

*Dedicated Service*  
*The Story of Reverend Geoffrey Bizeni Mkwanazi of the Assemblies of God*

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*Pathisa Nyathi*

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*Pathisa Nyathi*

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pathisanyathi2004@yahoo.com

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## **About Eunice Dlamini**

My name is Eunice Dlamini and was born on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February, 1962. I am the last born in our family. I am married to Mtonzima Dlamini and we have two children, Mnqobi and Philiswa.



I was born again in 1974 at the age of 12 years. My mother was a devout Christian. She encouraged us to grow in the love of God. I owe my spiritual growth to the family of the Assemblies of God (AOG) and to them I owe my business success. I have grown from a vegetable vendor to a successful businesswoman. To you members of the Assemblies of God, I say keep up the good work that you are doing.

I trained as a nurse and went on to work for Posts and Telecommunications Corporation (PTC) from 1994 to 2000 as corporate nurse. It was then that I saw God work in my life. My own story will follow later. In 2000 I joined the world of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) where I did development work. Then I entered the world of business and became a businesswoman. I have a business that I run with my family and was immensely thrilled when I won the award of entrepreneur of the year, 2012.

I enjoy every bit of my work, in particular cooking tasty meals. I owe my business success to the people of God who have prayed for me and supported me in various ways. I am a strong believer in hard work and in the empowerment of women and girls. My message is, “With God nothing is impossible.”

I promise more fireworks in my own biography. Look out for it.

I thank you

Eunice Dlamini

## **Dedication**

There are things, big or small, that one wishes for in life. It takes faith to believe in the Creator and faith in oneself and that there is nothing impossible with God. After reading “Long Walk to Freedom”, Nelson Mandela’s autobiography, “The Story of My Life”, also an autobiography by Joshua Nkomo, I as a Christian, got inspired. These two gentlemen have become very famous because of what they did for other people. As ordinary men, they risked their lives to liberate the masses. They committed themselves to pushing their agendas to the end. People like these are easy to sell, but very few people of God are sellable. As an individual, I am interested in seeing God’s work reach all the people: small or big; black or white; after all, we all have common origins.

I thought it a good cause to honour the Man of God, Reverend Geoffrey Mkwanazi by supporting the writing of this book so as to document his life story both for us and for posterity. Reverend Mkwanazi is deserving of such honour as he brought light and salvation into the lives of many. I thought that there was need for him to share his long walk with the Lord and I believe a book like this one will be a source of inspiration to many people, in leadership positions and the ordinary followers.

Reverend Mkwanazi was a leader without a title. He was a simple man and he needed no exaltation. Robin Sharma, writer of a book. “Leader without a Title”, describes such leaders as people who are selfless, people who live for others. They wish the best for others. Reverend Mkwanazi, I have found out, was an affectionate father and leader, full of wisdom and, above all, endowed with the knowledge of God. He is a man I would describe as a wise leader;



intelligent, spirit-filled and a loving, peaceful and a caring Man of God.

The question that vexed me was how people would learn about such a great man in the event he passes on without a written account of his life. I thought deeply over the issue. I prayed that God guide and avail the requisite resources needed to facilitate the task at hand, writing a book about Reverend Mkwanzazi.

I then engaged in discussions with Reverend Mkwanzazi, his wife Eleanor and their daughter Nops. They bought into the idea and at that time, in 2008, I approached Pathisa Nyathi to sell him the idea. As a result we agreed the work would be done in stages. He was more than willing to undertake the work. My challenge was that I did not have sufficient funds to underwrite the work. As a result the work was to be done in stages.

I wish to thank Pathisa for agreeing to do the work. You were indeed a godsend for me. Then I felt a sense of resolve and determination to undertake the work. My resolve was partly as a result of the trials and tribulations Geoffrey endured during his ministry. There were times when he looked down and almost out. Despite the troubles he faced, he remained loyal to Jesus and prayed for reconciliation and the love of God to fill the hearts of all.

It was a sacrifice worth taking to sponsor this book. It is my fervent hope that many church leaders will learn something from the book. I wish to thank Pastor O Masuku for doing initial work on the biography of Reverend Mkwanzazi. Pathisa drew some work from his writing. I had to sacrifice to wholly sponsor this book, which I

believe will bless many Christians and non-Christians. Leaders will have something to learn from this book. Thank you Pathisa for taking off your time to go through volumes and volumes of written material, pictures and several interviews to come up with such a fine book.

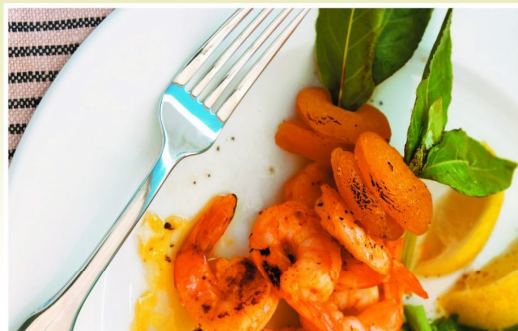
It had always been my wish to have this book published while Reverend Mkwanazi was still in our midst. The book will, I have no doubt, bring back memories good and bad. You will relish the idea that you have left behind a legacy that will inspire many generations to come. It is my hope too, that other churches or church leaders will write their own histories. The mind forgets, but the written word does not die.

My dear Reverend Father, I have not had sufficient time to spend quality time with you and your wife. To make up for that deficiency, I dedicate this book to you. It is the best way I can thank you for all the good things you did for me. This book, I wholeheartedly dedicate to you, your wife and family.



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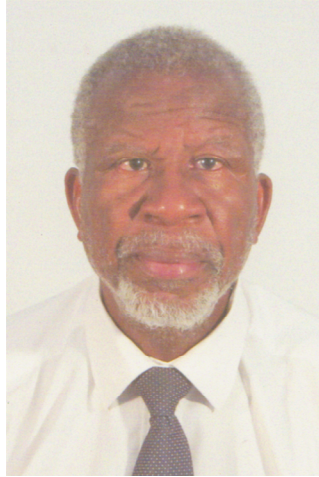
Email: [info@joyouskingdom.com](mailto:info@joyouskingdom.com)

Skype: Eunice.1

Website: [www.joyouskingdom.com](http://www.joyouskingdom.com)

## **About the Author**

Pathisa Nyathi was born in Sankonjana, Kezi, Matobo District, in 1951. After training as a science teacher, he taught at several secondary schools, became a college lecturer, headmaster at two secondary schools before becoming an education officer and finally a Deputy Provincial Education Director in Matabeleland North.



He retired from the teaching service in 2004 after which he joined the Bulawayo City Council as Public Relations Officer, a job he did till 2008. For a short period he joined the Culture Fund of Zimbabwe Trust as Resource Person. Now he works full time as arts and culture consultant.

Pathisa is a published poet, playwright, novelist, historian, biographer and newspaper columnist. He has written several books on the history and culture of the Ndebele people of Zimbabwe. Recently, he has been concentrating on writing books on cultural issues including the one on Africa's decorative designs (the circle and the chevron -written as part of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations for the Organisation of African Unity /African Union (OAU/AU). He is a member of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) UNESCO National Committee.

With no less than twenty five books to his credit, Nyathi is active in union matters for the writers. He has over the years sat on several boards, mostly to do with the arts and culture.

He is married to Elizabeth and they have three children

## **Acknowledgements**

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Reverend Geoffrey Mkwanzazi who was more than willing to avail himself to numerous long and strenuous interviews at his house in Matopos Road, Famona. He went out of his way to avail the researcher with relevant documents, some in connection with the numerous legal litigations, advertising material and conference papers. All these went a long way to clarify issues that found their way into the story. His affable and jovial wife Eleanor Mkwanzazi was excellent too. She was a good source of information relating to the period since the two got to know each other at Spring Valley Bible College in South Africa. Where Reverend Mkwanzazi's memory began to falter, she was handy to refresh his memory.

Where there are contestations, there are at least two sides to the story. While Reverend Mkwanzazi gave his side of the story, it was imperative, to achieve objectivity, to listen to the other side. Mathamsanqa Dube came in handy in the balancing act by rendering his perspective and that of his colleagues in the evolving drama within the church particularly following the demise of the charismatic Reverend Nicholas Bhengu. He, in the absence of Dr Cuthbert Chidoori who was leader then, acceded to interviews which helped the writer to have a binocular view of Reverend Mkwanzazi's story.

Both Dube and Israel Israel retrieved from their personal libraries, literature relating to various aspects of the story, in particular church growth both in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Nobizo Eleanor, the couple's daughter born on 23 June 1971 at Tshabalala

Clinic, provided information on the couple's children. Affectionately known as Nops, Nobizo is married to Robert Von Bennecke and they have a son born on 27 July 2006

Dr Cuthbert Chidoori, who at the time of publication of the book was in Zimbabwe, availed visuals from Harare which were relevant to the story.

Pastor Mackenzie Mavengeranwa Sibanda of the Luveve Assembly served as guide during the photo-shoot session. Having been saved in 1965, Pastor Mackenzie came to Bulawayo in 1968 and served as interpreter (Ndebele to Shona) to Reverend Mkwanazi when the latter was serving in Highfield, Salisbury (now Harare). On the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2013 we moved from assembly to assembly in Bulawayo taking pictures of members of the Assemblies of God in church. Pastor Mackenzie Sibanda knew where to find each and every one of them.

Finally, I wish to thank Jane Morris and Brian Jones who did sterling work of editing the manuscript.

## **Foreword**

Growing up in the city of Bulawayo, it was almost impossible as a Christian to be actively involved in the church without hearing of or experiencing the ministry of the legendary Reverend Geoffrey Mkwanazi.

To many of us young and passionate Christians Rev Geoffrey Mkwanazi was a towering example of old-time Pentecostal preachers, the ones that were plucked-out out of a hell-bent life, by the grace and hand of God were now so full of the fire and the holiness of God that they were awe-inspiring and even intimidating in their passion, fervency and walk with God. In our eyes he was larger than life and close in our estimation to a prophet or a saint.

To read this book is to be allowed a peak beyond the veil, and aura of the man of God, the evangelist, the pioneer, trail-blazer and patriarch whose towering influence and stature has been a beacon in the church in Bulawayo and elsewhere. To read this book has been a privilege that has offered us the rare opportunity to gain insights into both the life of a great man of God as well as the Back-to-God Crusade and its history.

The book is written in a very captivating and thrilling style, almost like a novel, but rich in its historical description and detail at a personal and national level. Its often candid narration of events, the good the bad and the ugly, is as refreshing as it is uncomfortable, especially in the drama surrounding the



Assemblies of God (Back to God) internal goings-on, but also in the personal life of Rev Geoffrey Mkwanazi.

As a founder of a church, there are many great lessons to be learned from a ministerial point of view, as well as from the complexities and dynamics that emerge when charismatic and founding leadership interfaces with church growth dynamics, management of diversity and leadership succession.

More than just being a biography, it is also a moment of reflection on a long life dedicated to the service of God and the church, and perhaps a personal catharsis for both Baba and Mama, as well as for the Assemblies of God church in general. Above all, it is a tribute to the enduring and endearing relationship between Geoffrey Mkwanazi and his best friend and partner Eleanor Mkwanazi and their love and obedience to their God.

For many like me, who were not privileged to grow up under the shadow and mentorship of such spiritual fathers, apostles and icons like Geoffrey and Eleanor Mkwanazi, this book has been a long awaited narration that will help us as orphans to suckle from the breast of wisdom and see with the eyes of history makers.

As spiritual parents, not only of seed in Assemblies of God, but in many churches and every corner of the world we say to you “For all the battles you fought, for all the tears you cried, for all the sacrifices you paid, we the new generation of leaders say thank you. *Siyabonga. eNkosi*. Your labour was not in vain. May the wings blow softly now, may the seed seemingly lost blossom now, may

the rain fall gently now and the rewards of harvest live long after  
the setting of the sun.

Dr. Goodwill Shana  
***Founder, Word of Life Church***

## **Preface**

I have always had an interest in matters religious and spiritual, whether African traditional or Christian. This has perhaps been a result of exposure to both religions and the realisation that spirituality is a critical factor in the creation of a people's worldview. As one with a passion for African thought or philosophy, I have been passionate about getting to grips with the ideological centres that drive a people's perception of the world and the cosmos in general.

The opportunity to delve into Pentecostalism presented itself when Eunice Dlamini (nee Nkomazana), the sponsor of this book, approached me to undertake that onerous task. Research started in earnest following an initial visit to the home of the Mkwanzazis in the company of Marieke Clarke. It was, for me, a golden opportunity to dig into the operations of the Assemblies of God in Zimbabwe in particular and the Pentecostal movement in general.

Several themes presented themselves which were a pleasure to unpack: church growth, unique Pentecostal phenomena such as glosolalia (speaking in tongues), healing and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, land appropriation and the concomitant evictions, the world of work under a racist labour environment, prison conditions for blacks, colonial education and some aspects of culture and history for the Ndebele people.

One theme that has a bearing on Reverend Geoffrey Mkwanzazi's life was the schism within the charismatic church movements. It was a pleasure getting into grips with the nature and scope of the friction and contestations within the church, a matter that was

referred to the courts. Ultimately, it was men and women of goodwill who realized the need to reconcile in the midst of seemingly intractable challenges. The one big lesson to emerge therefore, is that where there is a will, there is a way.

Some people felt the dark spots in the church's history should have been swept under the carpet or resigned under the tongue to remain there glossed over and pretending all was well. This was not the life experiences of the man who is the subject of this book. In any case, the court litigations were in the public domain. The newspapers picked up the stories which graced the pages of a number of newspapers.

More importantly, hindsight allows a better vision of a past that was clouded in smoke of prejudice, greed, selfishness and intolerance. When the divisive and sectarian and blinding smoke has subsided, people are afforded the chance for objective self-introspection. It is under these conditions when problems and challenges are seen in perspective that sustainable solutions are crafted. Burying the head in the sand ostrich fashion will yield no positive results-the rear is vulnerable, exposed and compromised. It is, in essence, procrastinating contentious issues that were never resolved-but incubated to hatch magnified and more ferocious and vexatious in future.

The aim in including the controversies that rocked the Assemblies of God in the 1980s and the first quarter of the 1990s was not to open old wounds, but to seek and encourage debate with a view to finding sustainable solutions to the challenges. When schisms do

occur there is a driving force or forces which are ignored to the church's own peril.

When the Assemblies of God successfully resolved their contestations, that provided a learning point to other institutions, be they religious or secular. When a plane crashes, the black box is retrieved and the fateful story preceding the crash is unraveled. The whole point is to learn about the causes of the crash in order to avoid similar mishaps in future. It is wiser to learn from a burnt child that to wish to undergo the experience in order to learn about the dangers of a fire.

The book and what it reveals will be invaluable to the faithful, in particular those who wield power and or authority. When a body grows fast, the process inevitably must be translated to specialization, that is, development. That is a way of coping with rapid growth. College and university students will find the discourse both academically challenging and intellectually rewarding.

## *Chapter 1*

# **Turning Point**

### **In Solitary Confinement – Number 4 Remand Prison**

He gazed dejectedly at the impregnable walls. Not even a louse or bedbug could squeeze out of the door to reach freedom. Muffled noises from a holding cell next door could be heard faintly. The massive walls weighed heavily on him. The past haunted him and the stout walls could not entrap his imagination. The past and present colluded, conspiring to bring him down to his knees. He found it hard to stand. With one hand he held his loose trousers. His belt, shoes and watch had been taken away from him. He could hardly hold his trousers up around his not-so-big waist. He slumped to the cold floor and pulled his legs towards his body, which was supported by the lifeless walls. His head sank between his knees. It was time for reflection.

Beyond one of the walls there was life. Hard core criminals shared a big hall. They snarled at each other but occasionally shared a joke. One or two had come in with a twist or two tucked away in their clammy anuses. Any other body aperture was not secure enough against the merciless prison guards. A slight stoop of the body and a rummaging hand were enough to retrieve a khaki twist. Soon each prisoner would take a deep inhalation, which assured a launch into a world of fantasy, beyond the stout walls, beyond the prison precincts, and beyond the urban settlement and its

alienating life. This was how, from time to time, the inmates escaped into an imagined freedom. Each time a new arrival joined those incarcerated; there was the hope that he might have had time to surreptitiously push *umthunzi wenyoka*, the criminals' term for dagga, into the lower end of his anal canal.

A sense of remorse and intense guilt gripped the man sitting alone in this soul-suffocating confinement. The cell was so small as to squeeze one's mind beyond endurance. Many succumbed to the maddening incarceration. For some it was time for reflection, to send the mind on an errand to search for alternative ways of life and a new beginning. The mind could then get out beyond the walls and the hill into which the remand prison was carved.

The man let go of his trousers, which slid down. His hand feebly went up to his head, where three fingers surveyed the contours. His thoughts turned inward. He was not on a high like yesterday when he'd taken a smoky glide into the sky. He is Geoffrey Mkwanazi, the son of Bizeni and MaHlabangana. He can't forget his parents even in this dark hour of his life. They were great parents and they had played their part in putting him on the right path. They were practicing members of the London Missionary Society (LMS), now the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA). He knew the path that they put him on did not lead him into this dead end, this dark, solitary place. This first awakening came after much introspection. He had deviated consciously from the path shown him by his loving and caring parents.

He is in solitary confinement. They call it *umgulukudu*, where the habitual hard-core criminals are usually locked up. They are

dangerous; prepared to attack less hardened, first time criminals such as Geoffrey. The tiny cell is infested with lice that are more than willing to collaborate with the jail guards in the punishment of the prisoners. The one threadbare blanket that is provided to the solitary inmate is the home of the blood-sucking vermin. At night they bite mercilessly. Geoffrey has no one to speak to except his own thoughts. He remembers vividly the previous night when he was thrown in here. The general holding cell was full to capacity. Too many criminals had been harvested from the streets of Johannesburg and brought in. The hall was bursting to the seams. He was one of those that had to be moved, to be accommodated in *umgulukudu*, a place for the very hardest of the hard-core criminals who would be a mortal threat to other prisoners. Geoff, as he was affectionately called by his friends, found himself having to part company with the other remand prisoners.

In the company of other prisoners there was some comfort. Experiences and hardships could be endured together. There was time to laugh and share *umthunzi wenyoka*. He remembered vividly how the unfeeling guards threw ragged blankets at them, and how they ferociously scrambled for them. The hall floor was filthy. The prisoners used their feet to clean it. Sand was brought into the hall and spread over the entire surface. Water was added to the sand. The prisoners then lined up barefoot with their feet touching each others'. They shuffled until the whole floor had been scrubbed spotlessly clean. As they shuffled they chanted: *tshikitsha mahala, tshikitsha mahala*. Subsequently brooms were used to sweep away the sand. Some clever prisoners avoided crushing the bedbugs, since those who did had their hands soiled red with blood, blood that the hungry bugs had sucked the previous night.



At breakfast no water was provided for washing hands. The routine meal comprised hard salted mealie-meal porridge laced with cooking oil. Those with blood-stained hands had no choice but to eat the food with their soiled hands.

### **Working for a Jewish wholesaler**

Geoffrey, in this moment of remorse and reflection, thought of the young criminals who had been sodomised by habitual criminals. The traumatized boys had no option but to oblige as violence was endemic. Those victimized could sometimes expect to be protected by their cell ‘husbands’ from the violence of others. Inmates had referred to Geoffrey as ‘*umfana wesudu*’, the boy in a suit. He had always been immaculately dressed, wearing a hopsack suit. Solitary confinement had at least allowed him to take a closer look at the reasons that brought him to this penitentiary. Good company leads one in good ways. Bad company leads one in bad ways. The latter was the case for him. His last employment had been with a wholesalers owned by a Jewish businessman. The enterprise, in Van Wallag Street in Johannesburg, sold Indian cloth such as georgettes and curtaining material, towels and handkerchiefs.

Geoffrey worked as a general hand. There had been a lot of pilfering going on within the business. Initially, he watched the nefarious practice going on but was not part of it. With time he got tempted. If you can’t beat them you join them, and that is how he had ended up in solitary confinement where he recalled the past in his soul-searching reflections. He started by pilfering a dozen handkerchiefs. His innocent heart pounded and his brow was suffused with fear-induced sweat. He imagined he had been seen. With time he managed to ignore the palpitations of his heart,

which eventually stabilized and no longer beat with a sense of guilt. He became a seasoned pilferer. He smuggled away a lot of goods, stashed under his clothing, and took them to the Location where he lived.

Sitting in his cell, the more he thought about what he had done, the guiltier he felt. He recalled the day that he ran out of luck. A big export order was being prepared for Australia. He took a big roll of cloth measuring thirty-eight yards. He cut seven yards off with a knife and hid the remainder. He imagined he would cut a few yards at a time until the entire roll was accounted for. But the missing roll was discovered. On that fateful day he had tucked some of the cloth under his overalls. As he tried to leave work, he was stopped and asked to take off the overalls.

As he cast his mind back to that terrible day, he saw the image of the menacing white man who apprehended him. “Please baas, please baas”, the desperate appeals haunted him. It was as if the heavily built man was right inside the cell with him, cursing and swearing at him. He tucked his head deeper between his legs. Reliving a tormented past was worse than the solitary confinement to which he was becoming resigned. His pleading had not saved him. The white supervisor had summoned the members of the Criminal Investigation Department based at Marshall Square.

He recalled the sound of their car screeching to a halt beside the wholesalers. There were no remand facilities at Marshall Square, so Geoffrey was rushed to Number 4 Remand Prison, which had been built by burrowing into a mountain near the suburb of Hillbrow. In his mind he saw the hall he had been thrown into, with its

assortment of strange and threatening-looking people. He saw the bundle of sordid blankets flying towards him. Those in that hall with slow reflexes faced a cold night without any cover for their bodies.

The past was clear, a lived experience, now part of history. He relived the previous night, but with no prospect of changing it. Geoffrey would have to wait until the next morning to face his fate, a fate he had brought upon himself. But, in his view, the future held promise. There was a future beyond the prison, beyond the walls and the fence. There was a worse prison out of which he had to escape and seek a new freedom. Mental imprisonment was worse than solitary confinement. He knew he would get out of this brick prison; it was the fear of continued mental incarceration that haunted him. He yearned for a new life, a life free from self-inflicted captivity.

Once again his mind set sail into a past that was now beyond reach, save as a painful memory. He thought about his family back in Bulawayo's Luveve Village, Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). He had fond memories of their family house along Mashona Road in the old section of the township, a village for blacks that had been established in 1937 to house African families within a racially segregated city.

Each night before they went to bed, the family gathered to pray together. It must have been these prayers that kept the family in spiritual togetherness, a cohesion that stood the test of time. It must have been the prayerful life that kept members of the family away from temptation, and out of prison.

### **Down Memory Lane –The Early Days**

Geoffrey recalled earlier days when his parents lived at Tshunkunyane across the Insiza River. When he left home for Hope Fountain Mission in 1942, the family gathered together to pray for his safe journey to the London Missionary Society school just outside Bulawayo. The same was the case when, in 1944, he left home to attend Tsholotsho Native Industrial Government School. Prayer had guided him then and kept him from all manner of temptation and danger. After lengthy contemplation in his cell, he came to the conclusion that he had to change his life. Was this not God’s way of speaking to him? Didn’t the Apostle Paul, then as Saul, see the Lord in painful circumstances? Haggard but determined to change the course of his life, Geoffrey lifted his frame from the cold wall. He remembered the posture that his body had assumed when they prayed at Tshunkunyane and Luveve.

As if rediscovering the presence of the Lord, he knelt down in the lonely cell and chose the company of the Lord Jesus Christ. He gathered his strength to call on the name of the Lord. “My dear Lord, if you deliver me from this dungeon, I promise you, my Jesus, I will work for you.” What was a bold step within solitary confinement proved to be a launch into a new orbit, a new promise and the start of a life-long journey in the footsteps of Christ, a life of testimony and service to the Lord. That was the key that Geoffrey needed to set himself free, free from mental bondage, spiritual incarceration and physical confinement. The commitment and dedication now occupied his mind. He felt a new sense of

purpose and meaning to his life. He awaited the next day with hope.

His incarceration was a good time for reflection and to open up his heart to his Lord. Geoffrey was able to scan the past and identify its strengths and good practices. His parents, Bizeni and Selina, epitomised walking in the straight path of the Lord. Surrendering one's life to the service of human kind was commendable. Resorting to prayer to seek guidance and dedication was worth emulating. In that regard, Geoffrey realized his parents had set a good example.

Geoff's memory took him back to the days at Tshunkunyane Primary School when Reverend Sitshenkwa Hlabangana of the London Missionary Society visited the school to conduct services. He remembered the day at Hope Fountain when Reverend Mntompe Khumalo, the son of Jojwana, and others, sought to guide them in the rightful path of the Lord. There was Tsholotsho Native Industrial Government School, also known as Mavela, where the teachers imparted practical skills. His mind flew to Tiger Kloof Institution in South Africa, which he attended after Tsholotsho. This had been his first stay in South Africa, the South Africa that sent him to a remand prison where he got the golden opportunity to reflect on his past and take good stock of himself, his life and what the future held in store for him.

### **Teaching at Mkhuneni Primary School**

He cast his mind back to the days when, after coming back from Tiger Kloof Institute having failed to secure funding to do Matriculation, he returned to Southern Rhodesia where he sought

temporary employment as a teacher. He taught at Mkhuneni Primary School, which was run by the Salvation Army. The school was in the Whitewater area within the breathtaking Matobo Hills. Here in the dark prison cell he could hardly tell how advanced the night was, but it seemed never-ending. There were no cocks to announce the advance of the sun. The morning star was not visible either. The best he could do was to guess the advance of dawn. His watch had been surrendered to the authorities when he was admitted to the penitentiary. The best way to kill time was to let his mind wander to the past. What he could not afford to do was to allow a void in his mind. An empty mind is a dead mind. Dead minds live within corpses. Life was worth living and he could ill afford to waste it just like that.

### **Working in Bulawayo**

There was still time to traverse the landscape of yesteryears. After a stint at Mkhuneni Primary School, Geoffrey had sought employment in Bulawayo with the Rhodesia Railways (now the National Railways of Zimbabwe – NRZ). He remembered the young social worker by the name of Joshua Nkomo. Geoffrey was not to stay there long. He was restless and ambitious. He joined the Cold Storage Commission (now the Cold Storage Company), which had been created during the hard economic times of the Great Depression. Yes, he recalled it was this company that afforded him the opportunity, if he might call it that, to move to Fort Victoria (now Masvingo). Fort Victoria was his springboard into South Africa for the second time.

From Fort Victoria, Geoffrey was catapulted into a criminal environment and finally this, solitary confinement within

*umgulukudu*. It was, by all accounts, the worst of places to which to be assigned. He recalled how he had entered South Africa using a false identity. He found his way to Kilnerton College outside Pretoria. Kilnerton was a short travelling distance from Alexandra, a sprawling black township outside the golden city that took the gold out of the hands of the black migrant labourers. Alexandra was the centre of all manner of iniquities that characterized black settlements. In apartheid South Africa, blacks were required for their labour and nothing more.

This place where he found himself was full to the brim with victims of the cold political and socio-economic system that churned out social misfits and hardened criminals. These were perfect customers for Number 4 Remand Prison. The squalid environment of Alexandra, characterized by high levels of unemployment, spawned gamblers, drug traffickers, illicit brewers, prostitutes and *amalayitha*, also known as *otsotsi*, the violent young males who were quick to use the knife. Racism underpinned the entire society, from accommodation to the shop floor. Blacks were regarded and treated not as equals but as inferior creatures, whose migration into white urban areas was strictly controlled through the pass system. Blacks adapted to the system and found ways foul to beat it. Women were generally not allowed into the urban areas except when they came to serve as maids and cooks in the service of the white man.

Geoffrey, at the time, lacked the consciousness to see the political intentions behind these policies. The African National Congress (ANC) was already in existence and operational in the urban areas. It was spawned by the racist policies of the South African

government. Geoffrey was not interested in politics, though he acknowledged the iniquities of racial segregation.

The night wore on and Geoffrey followed where his mind took him. He saw the township, dimly lit with the false brightness of the city lights of white Johannesburg. He heard desperate screams for assistance. He was not sure whether the screams came from within the prison or his mind as it recalled the screams of the victims of muggers in the dusty streets of Alexandra where rival gangs patrolled unlit streets. Could it have been emanating from the hall nearby, screams of new arrivals who had fallen victim to the caprices of the hardened criminals? The life of Alexandra continued to play out within the walls of the remand prison. Alexandra was a prison on a large scale while Number 4 Remand Prison was Alexandra at micro level.

His mind was beginning to tire. Surely the night was just about to exit the stage. The hard-core criminals and prostitutes were finding their way to their daytime hideouts. Those who had been netted and landed at Number 4 Remand Prison were about to wake up and resume their singing and cleaning dance – *tshikitsha mahala, tshikitsha mahala*. Yes, Alexandra was the hunting ground for prison citizens. His mind still had to complete painting his past. His first employment, after engaging in some further identity falsification, was for a life insurance company. A good lie got him into the good offices of Oppenheimer, the owner of the insurance company. Later, with South African citizenship bagged, he got employment with Spoornet, South African Railways.



Geoffrey felt a change in temperature. The walls had lost most of their heat throughout the night. The silvery beads of sweat had long given way to shivers. Geoffrey recalled through the misery of the cold that, after working for the Railways, he got a new job with the wholesaler. These were not happy memories. It was a horrid life being relived. He once again saw a towering figure right within the confines of the wall. It was the white foreman who had confronted him when the stolen roll of cloth was discovered beneath his overalls. During this single night spent in solitary confinement he had condensed his past life. Full circle, he told himself.

His desire now was to roll out a new life that would make him proud of himself, make his parents very proud of him and make the Lord rejoice with a soul dedicated to His service. If he remained in prison the future would not unfold as it did. He would not partake in the glorious conversion to the Assemblies of God. The marital bliss that lay ahead with Eleanor Linky, the daughter of Masombuka, would not be part of his future. He would not undertake the work with charismatic Reverend Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepburn Bhengu and the evangelizing work in the tents.

It would not be possible for him to undertake overseas trips to equip himself for the work of the Lord. He had left Southern Rhodesia in preference for South Africa, but little did he know that South Africa was the country where he would meet with his Lord, find service within the Pentecostal Movement and finally go back to serve the flock in his motherland. As the de facto successor to Bhengu in Zimbabwe he would face real challenges that briefly took him away from the Assemblies of God. All this remained

hidden from him as he sat in the prison cell awaiting the arrival of dawn and the hope of release.

The post-Bhengu era in Zimbabwe was characterized by serious fallouts, suspicions, conflict and schismatic tendencies, all of which shook Geoffrey to the core. It probably was just as well that the magnitude of the problems and their complexity remained concealed from Geoffrey. At the end of this troublesome period came a time of reconciliation and unity. The assembly of delegates in 2009 in Bulawayo's Zimbabwe International Trade Fair grounds to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Assemblies of God was a crowning moment for Reverend Geoffrey Mkwanzazi. He was the rallying point of the church, its face, its acknowledged spiritual leader and torchbearer.

### **Released from Remand Prison**

Dawn came. Geoffrey was released from solitary confinement. The prison authorities had checked his records. He lived in the township with a boy named Solomon Mzizi. Solomon had called at the charge office to pay Geoffrey's bail. However, Geoffrey had not been informed about this development. He remained in the remand prison until tea time. There was no communication before lunch. On this particular day, a Thursday, horse meat was served for lunch. The prison authorities were in the habit of slaughtering old horses to provide meat for the prisoners. The meal was sumptuous, especially when compared with the breakfast of thick salty mealie-meal porridge smeared with cooking oil.

Late in the afternoon a booming call came from a prison guard. "Hey, you, Geoffrey Mkwanzazi!" The barefoot Geoffrey, still

clutching his trousers, did not hear the call. “*Wena sibotshwa!* (you prisoner), I have been calling you, why do you sit on your ears?” Geoffrey had this time heard the harsh call and went to where the guard was standing. There was not much by way of conversation. All that he got as he exited from the hall was a hard kick from the guard’s metal-studded boot. Painful freedom is better than incarceration. “Get out. *Thatha* (take).” The fierce looking guard threw his shoes, belt and watch at him. Mzizi was waiting for Geoffrey, who trudged towards his friend. At a later date Geoffrey stood trial for his crime. That some of the material had been recovered was a mitigating factor. Being a first offender, he was slapped with a fine that, once paid, guaranteed him the much-needed freedom to consummate his promise to the Lord.

The new-found freedom was special in that it had a double meaning. It was physical freedom, liberty from prison, but more importantly it was freedom to make a choice, after his realization that the route he had followed to date was fraught with pitfalls and devoid of meaning and satisfaction. Though Geoffrey would not immediately serve the Lord, an irrevocable commitment had been undertaken. What was left was the opportunity to make the final switch and start on a new journey, a new life and a new commitment, characterized by dedicated service to the Lord Jesus Christ. It was a higher dedication to save lost souls, but it was his own soul that had to be saved first.

## *Chapter 2*

# **Early Life**

### **Growing up at Entunteni**

Whenever a baby is born there is great joy. This is more so when the baby is the first for the couple. Childlessness was perceived to be a curse, an abomination, in Geoffrey's culture. It would mark the end of a genealogical line. Through babies a family, clan, community and finally the human race are able to attain continuity. Bizeni Mkwanazi and his wife Selina Hlabangana were blessed with the coming of a baby boy who they christened Geoffrey. He was born on 30 August 1929. His siblings were the following: Christopher (1931), Ezekiel (1935), Jolimela (1938), Brightness (1940) Ruth (1942), Annette and Sybil. His mother went to her people across the Ncema River to deliver her first child in the comforting company of her own people. That was as demanded by Ndebele customary practice. It was common in those days to have two names, a parental name used at home and a Christian one for use at school and work. Bizeni was later named Isaac, a name from the Bible that was testimony to the parents' religious background. Bizeni and his wife were devout Christians belonging to the London Missionary Society, which had been introduced to Matabeleland by the Reverend Dr Robert Moffat. Bizeni had one brother, Vunguza, and three sisters, namely Mrs Gwede, Mrs Matshazi and Mrs Maduma. Bizeni grew up at Entunteni and attended primary school there before proceeding to Tiger Kloof in

South Africa. There he did carpentry and building and this would have an influence on his own son Geoffrey, who went to Tsholotsho Native Industrial Government School where he also did practical subjects. Bizeni, a man of strong character, later in life became a lay preacher in the London Missionary Society, which had established a base at Essexvale (now Esigodini). Reverend Sitshenkwa Hlabangana, himself a product of Tiger Kloof and a relative of Selina Hlabangana, became a pastor at Essexvale. Bizeni would continue as a preacher at their new settlement at Tshunkunyane, across the Insiza River and not far from Simbithi, where the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) Church had established both a school and a church, before settling at Luveve in Bulawayo. He was one of the builders who put up the Beit Hall in the native village. He also built several structures at Hope Fountain Mission. Geoffrey grew up under the tutelage of this God fearing and God loving man. Young Geoffrey remembered that his father used to wear khaki trousers and a khaki shirt and that he cherished polishing his shoes. Geoffrey just loved the smell of *Nugget* shoe polish.

Bizeni's father was Mogeli, who lived at Entunteni, a village headed by Mhabahaba Mkwanazi. The village was at Essexvale, not far from present day Bushtick (close to Falcon College), within the district of Umzingwane. Not far from Entunteni village are the Malungwane Hills. Mogeli is said to be the one who travelled with King Mzilikazi and his Ndebele followers when he left KwaZulu-Natal in a migration that finally saw them settle in present day Zimbabwe. Mogeli's wife Dlembu Khumalo, also known as Udlembu, was the daughter of Jojwana and therefore a relation of King Mzilikazi and his successor King Lobengula. They travelled in

the Khondwane Ndiweni party that struck a north-easterly direction from the Marico Valley following defeat at the hands of the Voortrekers in 1837. King Mzilikazi himself had personally led the other party that traversed the northern parts of Botswana. Khondwane Ndiweni's group included princes such as Nkulumana, the heir apparent, and Lobengula, the future king. Princesses were also found in the group, including Batayi, Nsimukhulu and Bhitshi. Mogeli's father was Nkukulana, one of whose daughters Zifosi, married Mdilizelwa, the chief at Esizindeni. Mdilizelwa, upon his demise, was succeeded by Mayenga, his son by Nkukulana's daughter. Mayenga's younger brother Swelubuyo was the father of Joanna Lova Fuyane who was Dr Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo's wife. Nkukulana and his relatives were of Nguni stock and belonged to the Amakhwanazi clan.

Entunteni had good soils and was well watered. A number of rivers, including Ncema and Nyawozibuhlungu, traversed the land. Grazing was good and large herds of cattle were supported by the lush green vegetation. There were also large flocks of sheep and goats. The Khondwane Ndiweni contingent, after carefully surveying the land, settled for the place on account of its environmental attributes. A number of villages were established in the general locality, such as Intshamathe (where MaXaba, Selina Hlabangana's mother came from), Ugodlwayo, Udukada, Intemba, Intshamathe, Izinkondo, Uyengo and Umzinyathi, the chief village of this group of related villages collectively called Amnyama. Majijili Gwebu was the overall head of the section and reported directly to King Mzilikazi. Apparently Rozvi royals under Ntinima (Mutinhima) had also chosen the area for themselves but were driven out by the Ndebele who arrived on the scene in about 1840.

The time of conquest came. There was a rush for the minerals between the two great rivers, the Limpopo and the Zambezi. The Portuguese, the Afrikaners, the English and the Germans were engaged in a fierce tussle to carve out colonies for themselves. The English-aligned British South Africa Company (BSACo), led by Cecil John Rhodes, won the contest and Southern Rhodesia came into being. The fertile lands at Essexvale were targeted by the whites, who sought to establish farms and mining claims. One such white man was Robinson, who the Ndebele named Umlobiseni. The weaker were evicted from the best lands. It was just a matter of time before the people of Entunteni were chased from their ancestral lands. What had hitherto been their land was alienated. The first and founding chief of Entunteni was Mhabahaba Mkwanazi, who was succeeded at the time of Imfazo II (Ndebele Rising) by his son Dliso. Dliso died at a time when Mathalazana, who was the rightful heir, was a minor. As a result Majinkila, Dliso's son by his wife Masuku, became regent. Majinkila died in 1922 and was succeeded by his son Alison Ngungumbane, also a former student of Tiger Kloof. The time for the people to move out had come, the whites claimed the land was theirs by virtue of conquest.

Some of the people went to settle in Nkayi, in particular those aligned to Mathalazana, while those under Ngungumbane went to Mberengwa. That was in 1929, the year Geoffrey was born. There were others like Bizeni who did not go with either of the two larger groups of evictees. Instead, Bizeni and his family went to live at Tshunkunyane. Bizeni, who was relatively rich by the standards of the time, owned a four-wheeled ox-wagon. In addition to the

wagon, other wealthier Ndebele men possessed guns, large herds of cattle, western clothes and had several wives. Bizeni had embraced Christian and western values and as a result had one wife, Selina Hlabangana. Bizeni inspanned his oxen and loaded the family belongings. Baby Geoffrey was carried in a large palm basket by his maternal grandmother MaXaba. Tshunkunyane, a place east of Malungwane Hills, was under Chief Jim Maduna Mafu, whose people had also been evicted from their ancestral lands not very far to the west of Entunteni.

The area that they moved to had been carved up in the main by three Christian denominations, the Brethren In Christ Church (BICC), the Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDA) and the London Missionary Society (LMS). For Geoffrey's parents the move to the LMS area of Tshunkunyane was a painful experience and an agonizing reminder of the demise of the Ndebele State. The place was a pale shadow of Entunteni in terms of the quality of soil and the quality of grazing. Not far from the place where Geoffrey grew up there were mines that provided markets for the garden produce that Bizeni farmed. Though the soil was sandy there was however plenty of water for the vegetable garden. Bizeni produced tomatoes, lettuce, spinach and beetroot, which he had seen grown at Tiger Kloof. He would, from time to time, ask Geoffrey and his siblings to eat lettuce. "It's good for your health," he would advise. The virtues of green vegetables were not readily understandable to the young minds. There were whites at the nearby mines of Morven, Fred and Gwakwata who bought the vegetables. Errands to the nearby gold mines were undertaken in the lighter and faster scotch cart. The scotch cart was also used as Bizeni's personal mode of transport.



Longer trips to Bulawayo were undertaken in the larger and heavier ox-wagon. Potatoes were sold in Bulawayo. After travelling for the whole day they bivouacked for the night and resumed the journey the next day. In Bulawayo they headed for a place between Mpopoma and Njube that was called Esipampurekini. Here Bizeni sold the potatoes that he had brought. Others sold chickens and farm produce from the nearby reserves such as Esiphezini and Ntabazinduna. The townships, including Mabutweni, Njube and Mpopoma, had been built after the Second World War when Bulawayo experienced accelerated industrial growth. Jobs became available and more people arrived in the sprawling town to work in factories. This, in turn, meant an increased market for the garden and field produce. Bizeni was one of those who supplied the Bulawayo black market with garden produce. His building skills were also put to good use at the police station at Filabusi. Wherever there was an office for the Native Commissioner there was also a police station and a native hospital. At Filabusi, just across the Insiza River, Bizeni built both the police station and the native hospital.

Bizeni had a relatively large herd of cattle. After graduating from looking after goats and sheep, Geoffrey looked after his father's cattle. In the morning the cows were allowed to venture into the bush to graze. Geoffrey and his brother Christopher would then go after them. They penned and milked the cows. Like all boys they got the opportunity to drink some of the milk by plugging their mouths to the teats in order to enjoy the warm, frothy milk. In addition to looking after his father's herd and milking the cows, Geoffrey assisted his parents in tilling the soil. Prior to colonization

the Ndebele used hand hoes to till the land and grow crops. The situation changed after colonization when ox-drawn ploughs came into use. The more well-to-do families were quick to adopt the new technology. Bizeni, having attended Tiger Kloof, where he came into contact with the new technology, was quick to adopt the use of the ox-drawn plough. He was then able to put bigger acreage under cultivation. Geoffrey and the other children assisted their parents during cultivation. Draught oxen were inspanned as early as four o'clock in the morning. By ten o'clock the oxen were rested and allowed to go and graze. At four o'clock in the afternoon, when the temperature was cool, work resumed until darkness fell. Then it was time to retire.

### **Getting Primary Education**

Tshunkunyane Primary School was a typical rural school of that time. The classrooms were of clay: clay walls, clay floors and clay benches. The roof was of grass thatch. Slates were used to write on and special pencils were used, those without using a whitish piece of rock called *umkhumence*. Bholi Mashengele taught at the school. On Sundays Reverend Sitshenkwa Hlabangana came to conduct church services. On arrival he rang the bell and the teachers, seized with fear, would scamper from their humble houses to meet him and conduct children to church. At the age of ten, in 1939, Geoffrey attended Tshunkunyane Primary School, where he did Sub-Standard A. He did not stay long at Tshunkunyane as he moved to Simbithi, the SDA school, where he did Sub-Standard B. There he lived with Elkana Ndlovu. Elkana taught at Shabani (now Zvishavane) where Geoffrey went to do Standard 1. Tragedy befell the Mathambo-headed school when subsidence caused the school to sink into the ground. Geoffrey was a rolling stone indeed.

## **Going to Hope Fountain School**

In four years Geoffrey had attended as many schools. His next port of call after Shabani was Hope Fountain Mission. The LMS mission was established as far back as 1870 when the Ndebele royal seat was established at KoBulawayo not far from Enyokeni. The LMS missionaries had established their first mission station at Inyathi in 1859. At the time King Mzilikazi was still alive and his capital was at Mhlangeni, close to where the LMS mission station was established. With the installation of King Lobengula in 1870 and the new seat of power being at KoBulawayo, the LMS missionaries felt divorced from the seat of power. This was the consideration that led to the establishment of Hope Fountain, Mthombothemba in the Ndebele language. At the time when Geoffrey went to Hope Fountain the mission school offered domestic science for girls and teacher training too. Around the school there were villagers of Enyathini who had survived eviction. Amongst the villagers was Ndiweni, who was related to the Mkwanazis. Geoffrey went to live at the Ndiweni homestead and attended school from there. He used to herd the Ndiweni cattle, which he took to Emnqunyweni, a hilly area behind the mission school. At Hope Fountain he did Standards 2 and 3 in 1942 and 1943 respectively. Among the subjects he did at school were Arithmetic, English and Zulu. His teachers included Dube, a Zulu from South Africa, and Reverend Mntompe Khumalo. Reverend Neville Jones, who the Ndebele called Umhlakazanzhlansi, headed the school. Geoffrey attended school with Leonard, who stayed with the Reverend Mntompe Khumalo. Their uniform comprised khaki shirts with round necks and matching khaki trousers. His attendance at Hope Fountain was during World War II and drills inspired by the military were

common. Geoffrey remembered how they drilled with the aid of dumbbells. During the holidays Geoffrey went home to visit his parents and siblings. The journey was undertaken on foot, by this time he wore shoes for the journey. From Hope Fountain Mission he headed for the Malungwane Hills where his parents once lived. From there he went to Malilangwe and eventually reached Dorman Store where there was a grinding mill. When a customer bought items from the store they would be given a 'bonsela', *imbasela*, comprising cookies. Having completed Standard 3 at Hope Fountain Mission, it was time to move on to a school that offered higher qualifications. That school was Tsholotsho Native Industrial Government School.

Initially, the Southern Rhodesian government did not bother to provide Africans with formal education. The British South Africa Company, being a commercial enterprise, was preoccupied with maximization of profits from mineral exploitation and other trading and commercial enterprises. The task of providing education was left to missionary endeavour. There were mission boarding schools like Hope Fountain where Geoffrey did Standards 2 and 3. In the rural areas several native schools were established, which doubled as evangelizing centres, with the instructors serving as teachers and lay preachers. Each Christian denomination established schools within its spheres of operation. Tshunkunyane, where Geoffrey did Sub-Standard A, was a case in point.

Only after the constitution of the Southern Rhodesia Native Affairs Committee (1910-1911) was there a shift in policy and direction. It was recommended that central institutions be set up in the reserves

where experts would offer training in proper methods of tillage and in other branches of agriculture. Further, the committee recommended the establishment by government of a central institution for native teachers. However, there was no movement towards the realization of those goals until Native Commissioner H S Keigwin showed a keen interest in the provision of industrial training for natives. His ideas were debated in the Legislative Chamber in 1920 and this was followed by the decision to set up industrial and agricultural institutions for natives. Indeed, Domboshava in the Chinamhora Reserve was established in 1920 and admitted its first students in 1924. Soon thereafter Tsholotsho Native Industrial Government School was established. In addition to agriculture these institutions also offered carpentry, building, stone masonry and leather-craft. The subjects on offer were followed in Standards 4, 5 and 6 and also in post Standard 6 industrial courses.

### **Attending Tsholotsho Native Government Industrial School**

Geoffrey and his friend Leonard applied for Standard 4 places at Tsholotsho. Their applications were successful and in 1944 they went to the school, which was headed by the strict disciplinarian John Hammond. Among the other students who Geoffrey met at the school were Edward Silonda Ndlovu, Stephen Jeqe Nkomo, Boysen Mguni, Thophe Mguni and Jason Ziyaphapha Moyo. These Tsholotsho students became prominent trade unionists and nationalist politicians. Some lived to see Zimbabwe born in 1980 and became part of the democratic government of Zimbabwe. Amongst the teachers at Tsholotsho were the following: George Mavankeni Dabengwa (agriculture), Mothobi (leather-craft) and Bhule (building). The subjects that Geoffrey studied were the

following: leather-craft, building, carpentry, agriculture and a number of academic subjects. When Geoffrey was at Tsholotsho in 1944, Mabhena was the school captain.

Tsholotsho area (formerly Gwayi) is characterized by deep Kalahari sands. The land is generally flat and drainage is poor, with water collecting in pans that become the haunt of malaria-bearing mosquitoes. Temperatures are high and ideal for mosquito breeding. Some students succumbed to malaria and consequently a decision was taken to relocate the school. The relocation was undertaken in 1945 when Geoffrey was in Standard 5. Zimbabwe's high veldt has a high altitude and a cooler climate and consequently is not an ideal breeding ground for mosquitoes. The choice made for the school's site was Umzingwane, not far from Entunteni, the ancestral home of the Mkwanzazis. John Hammond took the Standard 5 class in his vignette and drove them to the new school. Geoffrey was among them. The students in the Standard 5 class were the pioneers and the rest of the students remained behind at Tsholotsho and only came in subsequent years. The dormitories that had been built for the students were named to reflect colonial history. The names chosen were of men who, in one way or another, played a part in the colonial project. Geoffrey, together with Boysen Mguni, was in Jowitt. The names of the other dormitories were Rhodes, the chief architect of Southern and Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) and after whom the two territories were named, Coghlan, the first Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia, and Moffat (probably named after John Smith Moffat, the son of missionary Robert Moffat who acted as Rhodes' agent to King Lobengula). The names of dormitories at Tsholotsho were maintained. All teachers and students at the school were

male. The school uniform was similar to that of Hope Fountain, being khaki shirts with a round neck and khaki trousers. The prefects wore hats with tassels.

Sport was an important pastime at the school. The typical African sporting disciplines, soccer and athletics were popular. Umzingwane students used to compete against those from Hope Fountain, Cyrene and Inyathi. Geoffrey was never a keen sports person and described himself as a weakling – *idzanga nje*. On two occasions, while taking part in a soccer match, he broke his arm and left the field of play. Another way he described himself was as *imbethembethe nje*, one without stamina who walks awkwardly and clumsily. His interest lay in the arts. He was an avid reader and an astute debater. His eloquence earned him the title of Professor and he was often chosen to lead student delegations that forwarded complaints to the authorities. “Ah, *sivela ekudeni, iyo!* I had no idea what I would end up as. We’ve come a long way,” exclaimed Geoffrey as he took a deep sigh, as he remembered those days. In 1946 he completed Standard 6 but with no specific career plan. He had acquired the rudiments of leather-craft and building. The future was dark, holding neither promise nor hope. The best option at the time was to pursue further education. Tiger Kloof was set to be his next port of call in his pursuit of higher educational qualifications.

### **Years at Tiger Kloof LMS Institute**

One of the key LMS missionaries in Southern Africa was the Reverend Doctor Robert Moffat who ministered at Kuruman among the BaThlaping people. It was from Kuruman that he undertook a visit to meet with the Ndebele leader King Mzilikazi in

1829. In later years an institution was established at Kuruman and was named in honour of the Reverend Doctor Moffat. The institution constituted the educational thrust of the LMS. In 1905 the Moffat Institute closed down to resurface in Tiger Kloof in the Northern Cape, just south of Vryburg. The prestigious institution enrolled students from Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Bechuanaland (now Botswana). A diverse institute, Tiger Kloof offered a trade school, a high school, offering Union Junior Certificate (UJC) and Matriculation, a teacher training college and a Bible College. Among its distinguished alumni were the first president of independent Botswana Sir Seretse Khama and Quett Masire, another former president of Botswana. In the 1950s it fell victim to the tightening racist policies of the South African government. The National Party came into office in 1948 on the racist apartheid ticket. The notorious Group Areas Act sealed the fate of the international LMS institute. But that happened after Geoffrey had been through its doors.

While attending Hope Fountain Mission, Geoffrey became acquainted with two of the sons of Reverend Mntompe Khumalo, who was teacher and pastor at the same mission. The sons were Joel and Silas. Another of the brothers, Bonnet, was already a student at Tiger Kloof. To get to his new institution, Geoffrey boarded the Mafikeng bound passenger train en route to Tiger Kloof from the Bulawayo Railway Station. Students from Botswana boarded the train at Mafikeng. Quett Masire, one of these students, was hostel prefect to Geoffrey. Many of the former students from Botswana were later to become members of the Legislative Assembly, including Mogwe, Kgasi and Ngwako. It was a rare privilege to be a student at Tiger Kloof. Former students from the



Institute were referred to as 'umTK' and they were proud of their yellow and red blazers emblazoned with a badge. They wore grey trousers, greyish-khaki shirts, ties and black shoes to complete their school outfits. Their ties marked them as different from other students attending schools in Southern Rhodesia. The train bound for Cape Town pulled out of Mafikeng. Just beyond Vryburg Station there was a halt where students bound for Tiger Kloof disembarked. The other students who attended Tiger Kloof alongside Geoffrey were Solomon Nkiwane, Silas Dabengwa, Mtshena Sidile, Kingsley Dinga Dube, Mbonisi Moyo, Major Ngwenya, Dube's future wife Glendina (in the same class as Geoffrey) and several other girls. This was the period during which Geoffrey began to acquire a taste for alcohol. On the train bound for Bulawayo he and other boys drank copious quantities of wine. Under the influence of the alcohol, Geoffrey made advances to what he considered to be the beautiful Tswana girls. This was the time when Geoffrey began to 'go off the rails'. The students on the train came from feeder schools run by the London Missionary Society. Sadly, Geoffrey had to withdraw from Tiger Kloof when he had completed the Union Junior Certificate and a three-year trades course in building.

### **Teaching at a Salvation Army School**

Geoffrey's parents were not able to raise the necessary fees to enable him to proceed to Matriculation studies. Christopher, who at the time was attending Goromonzi Secondary School, together with Annette, was withdrawn from school and ended up as a teacher. It was time for Geoffrey to go back to Southern Rhodesia and await his fate. It turned out that he became a temporary

teacher, not in a London Missionary Society school, but at one run by the Salvation Army.

The Salvation Army, an international evangelical church founded in England in 1865, is well known for its charitable work. According to its tenets, before the soul can be administered to, the body, which houses the soul, must have its physical needs taken care of. The William Booth founded Christian organization has a quasi-military structure and character in the form of ranks for officers, a military organisation, marching brass bands and indeed its name. Its proselytizing thrust saw it spread to many parts of the world. At the time of the partition of Africa the Salvation Army was not to be left out. When Cecil John Rhodes of the British South Africa Chartered Company established a foothold in Mashonaland in 1890, the Salvation Army was among a number of Christian missions that rode on the back of the colonial bandwagon. The Salvation Army set up a mission in Fort Salisbury (now Harare) on 18 November 1891. Following the demise of the Ndebele State at the hands of the same BSA Company, the Salvation Army, *Impi YoSindiso*, as it is called in the SiNdebele language, became established in Matabeleland. They initially established a church for the whites along Fife Street in the centre of Bulawayo. Another church building was set up for the blacks in Makokoba. With time the Salvation Army spread its wings to the outlying areas of Matabeleland. One such area was Usher where a church was set up. The name of Usher has some historical significance in that it is traceable to James Henry 'Jimmy' Usher, the son of one of the British settlers in South Africa. Born in Queenstown in 1857, Usher first came into contact with the Salvation Army in Johannesburg through an open-air meeting. He converted to the Salvation Army

faith and was soon giving testimonies during open-air services. In 1893, the year Matabeleland was colonized, Usher migrated to Southern Rhodesia where he was involved in the transport business, ferrying goods by scotch cart between Bulawayo and Salisbury. His cousin, William Filmer Usher, was known as Mampondweni to the Ndebele people, amongst whom he lived. He even married Mzondwase, the daughter of King Lobengula.

Following the demise of the Ndebele State, there were further attempts in 1896 to regain lost independence and sovereignty. In the ensuing campaign several whites in outlying areas of Matabeleland were killed. A few who had barricaded themselves in fortified encampments survived. A number of whites were also spared by the Ndebele. Amongst them were the two Scottish cousins, James, known to the Ndebele as Silwane the Lion, and William Usher. After the skirmishes James Usher was allocated 6 000 acres of land not far from Figtree. From his farm Usher continued to travel on horse-back to attend church services in Bulawayo. In 1897 the Bulawayo Salvation Army corps received its first unmarried women officers. Amongst them was Captain Jessie Stuart Rogers, the daughter of an English Anglican minister. She and James, then a corps Sergeant Major, attended services together. The two fell in love and got married. It was important for the couple to be of the same standing if they were to continue in the Salvation Army. They hoped to achieve this by Usher training as an officer. Their idea was to sell the farm and raise the necessary funding to enable James to undergo the necessary training. Their plans were thwarted by the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War and the subsequent economic depression.

That was how fate would have it. Under a fig tree on the farm were seen the humble beginnings of the Usher Institute, so named after James Usher. When Captain Mrs Usher died in 1924, her husband James donated 500 acres of the farm to the Salvation Army where the Usher Institute, an evangelical and educational centre, was based. The Institute was officially inaugurated by Captain Frank Bradley and Colonel Allister Smith. The Usher Institute served as the launch pad into the rest of Matabeleland South. One of their out-stations was Mkhuneni Primary School in the Whitewater area within the majestic Matobo Hills. Geoffrey arrived as a teacher at Mkhuneni Primary School in 1950. Silas Khumalo, who had trained at Hope Fountain, was the head of the school. The school comprised a few buildings of mud and grass thatch with wooden logs for benches. Major Moyo, an officer in the Salvation Army, lived nearby and used to visit the school to conduct church services. There were a number of neighbouring schools such as Bazha and Whitewater. These schools used to arrange sporting and singing concerts amongst themselves. Schools in the general locality were run by the Salvation Army, the Seventh Day Adventist Church and the London Missionary Society. Mkhuneni Primary School offered education to Standard 3. Some pupils proceeded to the Usher Institute where they did Standards 4 to 6. The salary of a temporary teacher was modest but it did enable Geoffrey to purchase a *Phillips* bicycle, a proud possession at the time. Beer drinking habits that had started when Geoffrey was at Tiger Kloof continued during his time at Mkhuneni Primary School. At the time of his engagement by the Salvation Army he had been asked if he drank and if he smoked. To both questions the answer had been an emphatic no. His life of dishonesty had started. School pupils knew he drank like a fish and they would tell him where in the

villages he could buy beer. When Major Moyo conducted church services Geoffrey would be absent. He would be at one of the villages drinking beer. At the time he did not imagine that he would be a church minister like Major Moyo nor that he would kick the habit of drinking. Geoffrey's stint at Mkhuneni Primary School was but a stepping-stone into the private sector. It was while he was working for one of these private corporations that he found the opportunity to enter South Africa where his future career would take shape.

## *Chapter 3*

# **A New Chapter Opens: Leaving For South Africa**

### **Coming to Live in Luveve**

KoBulawayo was the seat of power during the heyday of the Ndebele State. Here, King Lobengula and his queens lived. When the soldiers put together by the British South Africa Company attacked Matabeleland in 1893, the king fled and ordered that the capital town, KoBulawayo, be burnt. When the white forces arrived on the scene, the former seat of power was still smouldering. A new town, modelled on western principles of town planning, was built a short distance from the site of the former Ndebele capital. As if to drive home that the Ndebele had been defeated, Cecil Rhodes named the town Bulawayo. On the very site of King Lobengula's capital town he built his state house. From the outset, the new town was racially divided in terms of settlement. While the conquering whites lived in suburbs such as Northend, Queen's Park and Suburbs, the unplanned settlement for blacks was located on the western end of town where smoke and dust were features. The black settlement was called the Location and later became Makokoba. Conditions were squalid – there was overcrowding and diseases were common.

For a long time Makokoba was the only township for black people. In the early days though, some workers stayed near their places of

work, which included the Rhodesia Railways, the Cold Storage Commission and Portland Cement (now Pretoria Portland Cement). Central government pressure mounted on the City Council to relocate workers residing near their work places. Only the ‘garden boys’ and ‘nannies’ would continue living in white areas – on the premises of their employers. As Bulawayo was at the centre of former Ndebele settlements, many of these continued to exist beyond the Commonage and also on the Commonage itself. With the promulgation of laws to segregate the races, the Africans were removed. Some went to reserves such as the Shangani (Nkayi/Lupane) and Gwayi (Tsholotsho). Yet others went to live in Makokoba, further exacerbating the squalid conditions. Particularly obnoxious was the Land Apportionment Act (1930), which divided the country into white and black areas. Urban areas were reserved for the white population, and blacks residing there were treated as temporary sojourners. It was their value in economic terms that forced the rulers to arrange some kind of accommodation for them. Women were not to follow their husbands into the towns and they had to obtain passes to visit their spouses. These laws resulted in the emergence of skewed family structures where there were more men than women. Furthermore, younger people outnumbered the elderly. This arrangement had its own attendant social problems.

Balancing the dictates of racial segregation against economic demands was a delicate issue. In order to have a permanent labour force that would reproduce itself it was necessary to have young couples. A balance was struck by establishing villages for the natives. These were established in Bulawayo, Salisbury and Umtali (now Mutare). Luveve, the native village built in 1937 outside

Bulawayo, was a long distance from the town. It was named after Colonel C L Carbutt, who had worked in KwaZulu-Natal where the Zulu nicknamed him Nomvemve. The Ndebele adopted that name but altered it slightly to suit the dictates of their language. He thus became Luveve. Non-government workers were allowed to rent houses and so black families were introduced into the urban set-up.

The onslaught was not restricted to the urban areas only. In rural areas too, blacks had to vacate those places that had been declared white areas in terms of the Land Apportionment Act. Tshunkunyane was declared a white area and so Geoffrey's parents were forced to move. Many of their neighbours moved to Nkayi, specifically the area under Chief Sivalo Mahlangu. Bizeni's brother Vunguza was one of those who went to Nkayi. This was the time when Geoffrey's parents decided to rent a house in Luveve. The house was Number 1388. At the time when Geoffrey left for Tiger Kloof his parents were still living at Tshunkunyane (Enyathini). However, by the time he completed his studies, they had already moved to Luveve, to a house along Mashona Road. The road was so named because a lot of Shona speaking people had come to Bulawayo in search of work, in particular the Manyika people who dominated the hospitality industry. Following the Great Depression of 1929, there was a heightened influx of Shona people into Bulawayo. Thus when Luveve was opened up in 1937, many Shona speaking people took residence in the native settlement. A number of them were later to open trading stores in the township, e.g. Nyaguze and Chigumira.



### **Working for the Rhodesia Railways**

Working at Mkhuneni Primary School was Geoffrey's last stint in a rural set-up. From Mkhuneni Primary School, where he taught for just one year (1951), he went to live in Luveve. This was a totally new social and economic environment, which took its toll on Geoffrey, who had, while at Tiger Kloof, tasted the wise waters. He arrived in Bulawayo after the Great Depression and World War II. The Depression had led to the creation by government of commodity marketing organizations, which were meant to cushion the white commercial farmers. The same facility was not extended to the blacks. For the beef producers, the Cold Storage Commission (CSC) was set up with its headquarters in Bulawayo, as Matabeleland is a prime beef producing area. The Commission, a quasi-governmental organization, had branches in other Southern Rhodesian towns such as Salisbury and Fort Victoria. It was this network that saw Geoffrey being transferred to Fort Victoria. His move to South Africa started from that town.

When Geoffrey moved to Bulawayo in 1951 he got employment with the Rhodesia Railways. This quasi-governmental organization was a big employer with its headquarters in Bulawayo. The network had reached Bulawayo in 1897 and provided the impetus for marked development of the new colony. Initially, the Railways had residential compounds where black labour was housed. Later they lived in railway townships, namely Sizinda and Matshobana. The white workers lived mostly in Raylton. Geoffrey did not live in a railway township but with his parents in Luveve from where he cycled to his place of work. Bicycles were the common mode of transport in those early days. Cars were few and the preserve of the fairly well to do. Cycle stockists such as Alick Stuart along Fort

Street in Bulawayo sold a wide variety of cycles such as *Phillips*, *Rudge*, *BSA* and *Humber*. Geoffrey worked at the Railways as a clerk, his responsibilities being to register workers and keep records of their working hours. Payment was based on the number of hours worked and that onerous task fell on Geoffrey. Among the prominent black workers on the Railways was Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo who was a social worker, having studied Social Sciences at Jan Hofmeyr in South Africa.

### **A Move to the Cold Storage Commission – Transfer to Fort Victoria**

Geoffrey did not stay long on the Railways. 1952 saw him move on to work for the Cold Storage Commission. Once again he worked as time clerk. He clocked the number of hours each employee had worked and at month-end closed his books and calculated the wages due to each worker.

While at home there was strict discipline, outside of the home environment Geoffrey succumbed to peer pressure. Makokoba was where he joined his friends to enjoy the pleasures that were on offer. The Bulawayo Municipality had taken over beer brewing from Ndebele women, though there was still a lot of illicit brewing within the settlement. The Big Bar in Makokoba served as both a drinking place and a venue for social events. Cultural associations were still strong and some of them offered cultural entertainment in the township. Musical bands sprouted, having been influenced by the musical scene in South Africa's black townships. Geoffrey and his friends tended to meet at Khanda's barbershop. Boys in the township who were known criminals, *otsotsi*, were quick to use the knife. One such infamous criminal was Nkosana. After meeting at

the barbershop Geoffrey and his friends would go on drinking sprees. This was in preparation for attendance at the Big Bar where Khahlu's band played. Geoffrey remembered that once drunk he became a real nuisance.

While at the Cold Storage Commission he was promoted to senior clerk. It was in this position that he and a number of other workers were transferred to Fort Victoria. The Cold Storage Commission had a unit in Mucheke. As a senior employee Geoffrey had a lot of responsibility. He kept the keys to the storeroom and eventually temptation got the better of him. He abused his position by misappropriating meat that he supplied to customers. He was approached by his customers, "Chiropa Mabharane. Matumbu Mabharane!" They wanted to be supplied with liver and casings. Geoffrey sorted the illicit orders and delivered them to his women customers on his bicycle.

### **Allure of the City of Gold**

Not far from Fort Victoria was Morgenster Mission, which belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church (Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk – NHK). It was established in 1550 and merged with two other Dutch churches to form the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PCN). Out of these beginnings emerged the South African Dutch Reformed Church, which initiated mission work in the Fort Victoria area. It drew support mainly from whites of Afrikaner stock. One day Geoffrey decided to pay a visit to Morgenster Mission where he found a young teacher who came from Kilnerton Institute. Kilnerton, also known as Wesleyan College, was a famous seminary of the Methodist Church situated in Pretoria. In 1886, with funding from Reverend John Kilner, the

Secretary General of the Wesleyan Society in London, Reverends Owen Watkins and George Weavind purchased the farm 'Koedoespoort' to the east of Pretoria. Kilnerton Training Institute was established on the farm. Initially it offered training to evangelists and ministers for the Transvaal (now Limpopo) Missionary District. Over time Kilnerton Institute grew to include a teacher training college, a high school, two primary schools, a Domestic Science College, a clinic and an Agricultural School. The institution fell victim to the Group Areas Act and was forcibly closed in 1962.

Geoffrey had a plan. He stole the teacher's identity papers, removed the photograph and replaced it with his own. From that moment Geoffrey ceased to be Geoffrey and became Misheck Ntabeni. Without any farewell formalities, Geoffrey boarded a bus headed for Beitbridge, crossed the border and travelled to Pretoria. As arranged, Geoffrey was met by Stevens Ndebele and a group of young men just beyond the University of South Africa (UNISA). Stevens was doing teacher training, while some of the boys who met him were doing Matriculation and others Union Junior Certificate (UJC). Geoffrey spent the night at Kilnerton, an overnight stopover. The following day Geoffrey, accompanied by Stevens Ndebele, pushed on; this time he was headed for Alexandra, a township for blacks in Johannesburg.

Johannesburg owes its rapid growth to the discovery of a gold reef in 1885. The mining industry was central to the town's development but soon other industries mushroomed. Black hands were needed to power the industries. The black workers lived in settlements that can best be described as squalid and

dehumanizing. The pass laws regulated the movement of blacks into towns and they were not regarded as permanent citizens. Single accommodation was provided for the predominantly young male workers. The workers shared ablution facilities and sometimes cooking facilities too. Hostels were built to accommodate arrivals coming from rural areas generally referred to as reserves. Indeed, the term was appropriate as these rural areas were labour reserves. The newcomers into the urban areas escaped parental control. A new urban ideology developed and the workers found themselves alienated. Their spiritual leaders were left behind at home. As a result many of the urban blacks were like loose canons within a society with its own values and worldview. Disorientation and its consequences led to high social costs.

This was true of Alexandra, a sprawling suburb for blacks, which was established in 1912 by a farmer named Papenfus who wanted to develop a suburb for whites. He named the nascent suburb after his wife Alexandra. It turned out that Alexandra was too far out of the Central Business District (CBD) and was thus declared a native township. That was before the Land Act (1912), which forbade blacks from owning land in white areas. As a result Alexandra was unique in that blacks could own land under freehold title. By 1916 Alexandra's population numbered 30 000. A health committee was set up to run the township, but could not collect taxes as the area was beyond the jurisdiction of the Johannesburg City Council. As a result the township was poorly resourced, a situation that led to poor management. In 1948 the National Party came to power on an apartheid ticket. Alexandra was placed under the control of the Department of Native Affairs. Family houses were demolished by the government to give way to high-rise hostels that

accommodated workers. This is the township that was home to luminaries such as Nelson Mandela, Wally Serote, Alfred Nzo, Samora Machel and Simon Mahlathini Nkabinde. The streets were dusty and unlit. People used coal stoves and, in the evening, there was a mixture of smoke and dust in the air. Organised armed gangs patrolled the streets at night. Some residents paid protection money to the rival gangs. Shebeens were major landmarks on the social landscape. Prostitution was a common economic activity in an environment characterized by immorality. This was the urban environment that awaited Geoffrey Mkwanazi. The young students with whom he spent the night at Kilnerton accompanied him to Alexandra.

Geoffrey saw that Alexandra Township was a rough settlement where murder, theft and rape were rife. He described the area as “the centre of crime”. Residents who had bought stands and built their own houses rented spare rooms to tenants. There were outside toilets lined up along the street. These were not flush toilets, instead there was a night soil service run by *Amabhaca* men. Night soil was collected in metal tins, then *Bhaca* men collected the tins and put them on a truck. They then left behind replacement tins. There were no lights in the houses but the streets were lit. The particular house where Geoffrey lived had no vegetable garden. Trees had not been planted on the streets. The people worked in Johannesburg and got there on the PUTCO buses. Passengers were picked up from numerous ranks, with the one nearest to their house being along 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue. At 4.00 am the people were already up and moving to the bus termini. Some people travelled in private cars, such as *Pontiacs* and *Chevrolets*, with as many as seven passengers being squeezed into each car.

Young people comprised the bulk of the population, though there were married couples occupying some of the houses. The people were able to buy groceries, in addition to furniture and electrical goods, in shops on 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue that were owned and run by both Africans and Indians. Jewish traders came from town to sell their wares in the township. Halls had been built where musicians performed. Among the more prominent singers were Dorothy Rathebe and Dorothy Masuka. These and other singers also performed in other neighbouring townships such as Sophiatown, Orlando, Mzimkhulu, Jabavu, Dube, Meadowlands, Imfulo and White City. Sophiatown was the leading area for music at the time.

Alexandra could best be described as social hell, a hell created by racism and the alienating political, social, economic and spiritual environment. Shebeens sprouted as a result of denying blacks access to the places where whites drank. Whites were not keen on blacks drinking bottled beer. What was available, and what they could drink in public beer halls, was African beer. Because of the racial restrictions, blacks in the townships resorted to illicit brews and to the consumption of bottled beer in illegal shebeens, which in the days of political struggle became venues for political meetings. This was the case both in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia. Gambling schools, using dice and cards, where rules were often flouted, sprouted everywhere and became centres of violence. Winners were sometimes robbed. The young Geoffrey could not resist the attractions of the gambling schools and used to frequent them on Fridays.

### **Following the Corrupt Way: Getting a False Identity and a Job**

The whole point of coming to the cold City of Gold was to secure employment. Up to that point Geoffrey had been using the papers stolen from Misheck Ntabeni. This was not good enough for Geoffrey as the pass identified him as a Zimbabwean, so he decided to visit the Native Commissioner's office to try and get local identity documents. He was not successful. A hail of questions was thrust upon him. Who is your father? Who is your mother? Where were you born? The Ministry of Home Affairs stamped his pass and instructed him to get out of the country as soon as possible. But Geoffrey was determined to stay in South Africa. He managed to evade detection and sought employment with the Road Department where he worked with pick and shovel. All the time he was hoping to get the requisite documentation but nothing materialized.

Lady Luck eventually smiled on him when he got in touch with Paul Sodindo, a cousin of the Reverend Canaan Sodindo Banana, the first president of independent Zimbabwe. Paul was the type that Geoffrey described as *ihumutsha*, one conversant with the not-so-straight forward ways in town. He worked for a law firm in Johannesburg but, at the same time, illegally sold identity documents. There were many South African blacks living illegally in the urban areas and they needed documents to allow their stay. There were also illegal immigrants from Southern Rhodesia and other territories to the north who needed documentation. The rapidly expanding mining, industrial, commercial and domestic sectors provided a ready job market for the blacks. The likes of Paul thrived on beating the system. Where there is demand, there is supply. Paul helped Geoffrey to get a job in an insurance



company, where he canvassed people to take out life insurance policies. He was paid on commission. The insurance company that he worked for belonged to Harry Oppenheimer of Anglo American. Paul had approached the Jewish tycoon, explained Geoffrey's situation and asked if he could assist. Oppenheimer's facilitation worked and Geoffrey got the papers. There was great jubilation when he acquired this new status. He was now Geoffrey Mkwanazi, a Zulu born in Alexandra. Unfortunately, Geoffrey was not a success in the business of insurance and he was on the move once again, this time to familiar territory.

Geoffrey got a job with the South African Railways at Braamfontein. In that area there was a railway compound with accommodation for the employees, where Geoffrey was allocated a room. As an office clerk his job was to write down the names of people who were entitled to *imbunyane* (brown bread) and a bucket of *amahewu*. He also registered those being employed. The Pimville-Johannesburg section of the rail route faced extensive cheating by commuters. Cheats boarded the train but did not pay, avoiding the ticket checker by moving from one coach to the next, playing a game of cat and mouse. To try to counter this, a number of young men had been engaged to prevent cheats circumventing the system. Geoffrey engaged the men, who were then stationed at Park Station, Pimville and Orlando. Those intending to travel by train now had to get tickets first, otherwise they would not be allowed to get to the platform. The hired men's task was to enforce the new regulation. While doing his routine work, Geoffrey worked extra hard to learn Zulu and Xhosa. His Rhodesian identity had to be concealed. Was he not now a Zulu born in Alexandra? Documentary identity had to match language.

Geoffrey's boss, an Englishman, was fond of him, but unfortunately he worked with Joubert, an Afrikaner. Joubert wanted to be saluted by blacks, even those who were the same rank as him. The railway police, mostly Shangaans, did salute Joubert. However Geoffrey insisted, "I will not salute you, Mr Joubert. You are a clerk, so am I." There was bad blood between the two. In Joubert's racist mind any African was a 'kaffir' who was inferior to any white. It was blatant discrimination of this kind that riled the blacks. The compounds and hostels where black workers were housed were characterized by overcrowding and inhuman treatment. The system was introduced to minimize pilfering, especially of precious minerals such as diamonds. Blacks got lower pay, even for equal work. Managerial positions were reserved for whites. Entry into towns by blacks was controlled, to minimise the 'black menace' by having only those who had been accepted under the pass laws. Racism sought their exclusion but the more compelling economic demand wanted their inclusion. They were needed but not wanted. Social amenities were racially divided. Not only were there townships set aside exclusively for blacks, but cemeteries, churches, cinemas, schools, sporting facilities and public transport were segregated. The notorious colour bar was at work.

By the 1950s, some black people in South Africa had studied at institutions such as Fort Hare, the University of South Africa, Lovedale College, Ohlange College, Adam's College, Kilnerton and Tiger Kloof. Some had travelled overseas and been inspired by new ideologies. In particular, Afro-Americans such Willian Du Bois and Jamaicans like Marcus Garvey had been of great influence.

India had, under the Congress Party, obtained her independence from the British. The Congress Movement was on the march on the African continent, in particular in Southern Africa. Mission schools espoused Christianity, which promoted the idea of equality, and yet, on the ground, the story was different. As a result Ethiopianism was on the rise, together with the African Independent Churches(AIC) such as the Zion Christian Church (ZCC). Trade unions such as the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) had been formed. As far back as 1912, a Native Congress for natives had been formed in Bloemfontein. By the 1950s it was known as the African National Congress, *uKhongolosi* as some blacks called their movement. In Alexandra Township the African National Congress (ANC) had a strong presence. Paul Sodindo, the *ihumutsha*, was a member of the organization. Geoffrey was aware of the existence of the political movement but avoided joining its ranks. He knew too well what the likely consequences of political activism were: detention being one of them. As a result he avoided the ANC meetings in the township. Geoffrey, the rolling stone, was on the move once again, having been fired from the railways, courtesy of the man he declined to salute – Joubert. The next job that he found was the one that landed him in remand prison. There he made the turning point in his life, when, down on his knees, he promised the Lord that he would work for Him if He delivered him from prison. Delivered from prison he was. What was left was for him to fulfil his side of the bargain.

## *Chapter 4*

# **Embracing Pentecostalism:**

## **Conversion to the Assemblies of God**

Isaiah Chapter 57, Verses 20-21

But the wicked are like the tossing sea; for it cannot rest,  
and its water toss up mire and dirt.

There is no peace says my God, for the wicked.

### **‘A Native Wants to be Saved’**

Johannesburg, known to the local Sotho people as Gauteng, the place of gold, was growing fast. Factories were set up to manufacture goods that the burgeoning market needed, ranging from food to clothing. Though he had escaped prison, Geoffrey was without a job. He started looking and found one at Doornfontein, where he worked in a clothing factory that specialized in the manufacture of socks. It turned out that this would be the factory that would be used by the Lord to serve Him. At the factory Geoffrey worked with Edmund, a young man who had converted to Christianity. With his Bible to hand, Edmund would say, “Jesus can save you,” and he would go on to give testimony about how he himself had been saved by the Lord, inspiring Geoffrey.

The manager at the factory was a white man of Italian origin. He was an abusive racist. Sometimes he would fly into a frenzy and spew racist insults at Geoffrey, who cried but could do nothing about it. His friend Edmund came to his rescue and drove home his Christian message, "It's all right Geoff, that's what happens when you have no Jesus. Please be quiet." Edmund belonged to a church whose white pastor, who ran a Bible school, lived in the exclusive suburb of Roodepoort on the way to Rustenburg. It was arranged for Geoffrey to go and meet the pastor, who was originally from Chicago. "There is a boy who wants to be saved," announced his wife when Geoffrey arrived. The pastor was a 'do-it-yourself' enthusiast and he was busy painting the house. He quickly left the paintbrush to attend to the visitor, discarding his overalls in order to don a blue suit. The pastor's wife prepared a cup of tea for the visitor and led him to a comfortable sofa in the lounge. Geoffrey was touched by the welcome, rare in racist South Africa. Afrikaners, in particular, embraced the doctrine of apartheid. Some missionaries managed to adapt and to admit blacks through the back door.

After the greetings were over, Geoffrey and the pastor got down to business. As the pastor read from the Bible, Geoffrey's mind wandered back to the days when his parents read the Bible at home. He remembered the days at Tshunkunyane when Reverend Sitshenkwa Hlabangana used to read the Bible to them. His mind also flew to Tiger Kloof where Bible lessons were part of the daily diet. Major Moyo of the Salvation Army loomed large in his mind. Here he was now, being reintroduced to the Bible, which he had abandoned until that fateful day at Number 4 Remand Prison when he went down on his knees to seek the intervention of the Lord. What had initially been a sense of guilt and loss turned into

hope for salvation. After all, the Lord was answering his prayer. Here he was on a comfortable sofa in an attractive suburb with a pastor who was reintroducing him to the source of salvation. Geoffrey thought hard; he was at a crossroads in his life. He could continue along the path that had led him to shebeens and gambling schools and finally to prison, or choose to be born again in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. The pastor helped him to make the critical choice. He spoke to Geoffrey about his soul and finally got to the point where he perused the Bible and his eyes landed on the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 57, verses 20-21. After reading the verse the pastor took a long and piercing look at Geoffrey and thrust a question at him. “Do you have peace, son?” Geoffrey felt weak. The question seemed to drain the energy out of him. After some hesitation he managed to respond, “No, I have no peace.” The pastor placed his hands on Geoffrey and led him in prayer, before he asked Geoffrey to pray for himself. Once the prayers were over, Geoffrey felt relieved. The prayers had a cathartic effect on him and he felt his burdens taken away. He was lighter now and ready to make a fresh start. The pastor spoke to him, “There is one person who can give you peace. It is Jesus Christ. Do you accept him?”

This was the initial contact with the pastor, which, in the fullness of time, would open a new chapter in Geoffrey’s life. Small gains need follow-ups and consolidation, the pastor knew that very well. When Geoffrey went back to his place of work, the pastor visited him during lunch breaks. The pastor’s car was used for their meetings, where he prayed for Geoffrey. That consolidation marked the beginning of a life of evangelism for Geoffrey, a calling that would take up the rest of his life. It was a break with the old ways and the embracing of new ones. A new world-view opened up

for him. He was ready to sail to the ends of the world, carrying the good news. The trip that started from Fort Victoria had come to this. The Lord was with him, the Lord followed him. Henceforth Geoffrey loved the word of God and ran a Bible school. At this stage he did not have a particular denomination to which he belonged. Edmund and the white pastor were members of General Mission.

### **Witnessing Baptism by Water**

The Assemblies of God, a Pentecostal church with assemblies in various locations in Johannesburg, used to conduct meetings outside the City Hall. The white members sang, played the concertina and held prayers. Among the white group of Assemblies of God members was one black man, Abel Ndzishe, who played the concertina. Ndzishe approached Geoffrey and invited him to visit them at the Pimville assembly of their church. Geoffrey was staying at Alexandra at the time.

On the day Geoffrey visited the assembly it was baptism day. It was an important day as several members of the Assemblies of God from Nigel, Springs and Benoni all gathered at one place – a dam in Benoni. Geoffrey was asked to come along with the group that was going for baptism. Initially Geoffrey had hesitated to respond as he had arranged to meet his girlfriend Queen, a nurse at a local hospital, on that day. Geoffrey sought a way of extricating himself from the baptism. “Sorry, but I have no transport money,” Geoffrey told the church members. He felt a sense of uneasiness and foreboding telling such a lie. Was this not a relapse into his old ways? He began to see a vision of the Roodepoort pastor holding his hand and praying for him. The scenes of prayer in the pastor’s car began to haunt him. Was he not breaking the covenant made in

the prison cell? He felt he was betraying the trust bestowed on him by the pastor. It was a betrayal, a great betrayal, with which he could not live. He had to make a choice between the Lord and the girlfriend, the Lord won and Geoffrey jumped on to the truck. “That was good for me,” interjected his wife Eleanor during the interview. Eleanor had filled the void left by Queen the ditched girlfriend. She became Geoffrey’s faithful spiritual pillar and his partner in the crusade to spread the word of God, in South Africa, Sweden, America and Southern Rhodesia. Years later, Ndzishe reminded the congregation at Pimville about the incident. Eleanor was asked to testify how the power of the Lord made Geoffrey abandon Queen. She did this eloquently and with gratitude to the Lord who had intervened, ‘*kwadilik’ uQueen*’ (love between Queen and Geoffrey collapsed). That day was important for Geoffrey, who was still a smoker at the time. He thoroughly washed his brown nicotine-stained fingers and sucked some sweets to disguise the smell of cigarettes. There was great joy and jubilation from the members who looked forward to the great outpourings of the Holy Spirit following baptism by water.

That special day was a Saturday. There were long queues of people at Benoni who had come for the baptism. The place had been a quarry where granite for construction was excavated. Now it was a place that several Christian denominations made use of. Both the Zionist and Apostolic churches conducted baptism sessions at Apex dam. On this particular day Apex Dam was a hive of activity. Males gathered on their own – in a lorry where they changed into baptism clothes. Women were in another lorry doing the same. “I’m just invited to this place. I do not really qualify,” said Geoffrey to himself. There was emotional singing and rousing prayer.



A man from Nigel signalled the start of baptism by offering a prayer for those who were about to be baptized. The people were already in a queue, eager to take an important step in their spiritual lives. Geoffrey watched what was going on closely. His mind was very active. He looked at one lady in the queue and remained focused on her for quite a while. A lot of thoughts raced through his mind. What was it about the albino lady that attracted his attention? He followed with keen interest everything she was doing. She removed her head cover, her *doek*. Her hair was snow white, as white as the snow that Geoffrey would see later in his life in Sweden. The question that raced through Geoffrey's mind was, "Will this lady be baptized and go to Heaven while I remain behind?" The man from Nigel continued praying. Geoffrey felt a strong gust of wind blow over him. Soon he was crying and shaking vigorously. He wiped off his tears. It was the first time that he felt the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; he was overcome by it. The people that he was with had fasted and prayed for seven days in preparation for this special day. Some of them were also being shaken by the Holy Spirit. Geoffrey could not resist the Holy Spirit. Distraught and shaken, he wanted to take a plunge into the pool in his suit. "No, no, not today. But some other day," he was advised. Geoffrey cast his eyes on the dam waters that served as a screen on which he saw a vision of Jesus Christ nailed on the cross. Then he saw Jesus lift his head and say to him, "Come to me all ye who are heavy laden. I will save you." Geoffrey was overcome by the Holy Spirit. Throughout the entire ceremony he cried uncontrollably.

The Holy Spirit taking over his body was a heart-rending experience for Geoffrey. The Holy Spirit overcomes the body when

it pours down on the person. This was Geoffrey's experience with the Pentecostal phenomenon of the Holy Spirit, with its gifts that he would bear witness to later in his life. Baptism in Apex Dam came to an end when one group, belonging to the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), met a disastrous fate in the dam. Members of ZCC had gone for baptism in the dam as they had always done. A snake in the water attacked some of the members. From that day, the churches ceased to use it for baptism. The City Council cordoned the dam off and no one was allowed to go in again.

Geoffrey continued to work at Doornfontein. All this time he was looking for a church to join. Ndzishe invited him to the Assemblies of God Church at Pimville. It was Ndzishe who can be credited for encouraging Geoffrey to join the Assemblies of God. Ndzishe, an evangelist and singer, used to visit Reverend and Mrs Mkwanzazi many years later, when the latter were living in Zimbabwe. On their last visit to Zimbabwe, the Ndzishes were offered flight tickets back to South Africa by the Mkwanzazis. "You paid for him to go to Springs (on the day of baptism), I will fly you back," said Eleanor with a broad grateful smile. Geoffrey did not stay long at Doornfontein. He wanted to formalise his career as a professional evangelist in the Assemblies of God. The church had a Bible School in Witbank.

### **Origins of Pentecostalism**

The Assemblies of God that Geoffrey now belonged to was part and parcel of the broader Pentecostal movement, which was on the march on the Christian world stage. Pentecostalism is rooted in the events that took place in the late spring of 30AD, fifty days after the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and ten days after His Ascension. On

that eventful day on Mt Zion in Jerusalem, about 120 of his followers gathered together to pray. As they did so there came upon them tongue-like flames that seemed to fall from above and to rest upon the heads of all present. The experience had an illuminating, empowering and abiding effect on those present. From the outpouring of the Holy Ghost on that day, the birthday of the Christian Church, the fellowship of those early years has been rightly named the Pentecostal Church. One phenomenon that was observed on that day was that those present began to speak in tongues and that they were ready to proclaim the good news to all the corners of the earth. However, it was found later that the gift of speaking in tongues, a result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, was no longer happening. It was to take several centuries before there was a revival that had the characteristics of the original Pentecost.

Modern Pentecostalism is traceable to the mountains of Carolina. However, the movement was consolidated in 1901 in Topeka, Kansas, in the United States where its origins are attributed to Charles Fox Parham, formerly a Methodist itinerant preacher and healer. Parham ran a Bethel Bible College where one of the students, Agnes Ozman, spoke in tongues. The college offered a variety of subjects, among them Baptism in the Holy Spirit. At the time the Pentecostal movement manifested itself as the Foursquare Gospel, The Latter Rain of the Holy Spirit or the Holy Ghost Revival. From Topeka, the flames of Pentecostalism spread to other parts of America. Many people from across the country came to witness the new form of Christian expression, which was characterised by wild singing, ecstasy, charisma, spiritual healing,

glossolalia (speaking in tongues), physical healing and the casting out of demons.

One of the people who came to Topeka was William J Seymour, a black Holiness Movement preacher. Seymour embraced the message and took it with him to Los Angeles in California. His base in Los Angeles was the African Methodist Episcopal Church on Azusa Street. For a protracted period of three years there was outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the meetings that Seymour conducted. Blacks, whites and people of first nations came for healing and exorcism. So intense and demanding was the revival that its driver Seymour became drained and exhausted. The Pentecostal flames could not, given their powerful allure, be confined within the boundaries of the United States. The flames leapt the seas and reached other parts of the world: Europe, South America, Asia and Africa.

The media were used to maximum effect in propagating the message. Periodicals such as *The Apostolic Faith* and other religious tracts helped spread the message of Pentecostalism. In Africa, Pentecostalism reached South Africa in 1908. Its willing agents were Mr and Mrs John Lake, John's disabled sister and other members of the team. John Lake had been involved in the Holiness Movement. He worked in Zion City in Chicago. His group, belonging to the Apostolic Faith, arrived at a time when there was an economic depression in South Africa. Soon the Pentecostal revival was ignited in South Africa, where other Christian churches were already in existence.

### **The Spread of Christianity: Socio-Political and Economic Conditions that Nurture Pentecostalism**

Christianity entered Africa through Ethiopia and Egypt. Later, during the times of trade with the East, Christianity took root in coastal areas such as Angola, the river Congo and Mozambique. The Jesuits ventured inland as far as the Munhumutapa State. Missionaries came to South Africa in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. At the time various African kingdoms were still in existence. Some of the church establishments set up bases at the royal courts and sought to convert the kings. In South Africa, the London Missionary Society under the direction of John Philip took root quite early. Other denominations followed, so that when the Pentecostals arrived in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century there was a strong presence of Christian churches in South Africa. The following were some of them: the Salvation Army, the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Dutch Reformed Church, the Wesleyan Methodist Church, the Lutheran Church, the Berlin Mission and Swedish Alliance. Despite so many churches having established themselves ahead of them, the Pentecostals identified their niche, which they occupied with relative ease. There were numerous reasons for this.

Though the Christian churches preached equality of all people, in practice this was not the case. There was racism within the Christian movement. The Africans felt sidelined and marginalized. They became restless and responded in numerous ways. Some kept within the broader framework of the mission churches but developed what is termed Ethiopianism. In essence, this movement of disgruntled blacks offered decency, respect and dignity to the Africans. Yet other Africans, finding mission Christianity to be

divorced from their African experiences, started African Christian Independency. Both the Zionist and Apostolic movements were syncretic responses to mission Christianity, which did not differentiate between Christian religious essence and western culture. The result was a large body of Christians who felt marginalized by the mainstream churches. Pentecostalism, through its spiritual healing, was an instant attraction. This was more so given that Pentecostalism, through the Apostolic Church, arrived in South Africa during the time of economic depression. Many people were either unemployed or their wages were low. The Pentecostals offered free treatment. This was also an attraction to the Afrikaners, who were second class citizens in relation to whites of English stock. It is no wonder, therefore, that Pentecostalism took root mostly among the Afrikaners and blacks.

Among the Africans the ecstatic character of Pentecostalism was an added attraction. African Traditional Religion (ATR) is characterised by wild singing, dancing and clapping of hands. Besides, ATR is spiritual, a trait exhibited by Pentecostalism. The spiritually inclined Africans found comfort and relief within this new Christian spiritual dispensation. At the same time, Pentecostalism exorcised demons, in line with the spiritual philosophy engrained in African traditional religious thought. Speaking in tongues was not difficult to comprehend among the adherents of ATR. Spirit mediums, when possessed by the spirit, spoke in a language that the medium and the people no longer understood. There would always be someone within the family with the gift of interpreting the foreign tongue.

Pentecostalism had grown in America in reaction to the cold and dehumanizing process of industrialization. The formerly agrarian society found itself alienated. Life was difficult to cope with, and people needed a deeper meaning to life, beyond what rational capitalism offered. The developmental setting for Pentecostalism in America had a parallel in South Africa. The discovery, initially of diamonds in Kimberley and later gold in the Rand, gave impetus to industrial growth. Industrial capitalism is powered by exploited labour. In South Africa that labour was in the main black. Hitherto, the blacks had led an independent life under the various African kingdoms. To maximize resource exploitation, African kingdoms were subjected to white rule. That was achieved through violent conquest. Measures were then taken to proletarianise the Africans. The introduction of hut and poll taxes was a way of forcing the male Africans, in particular, to leave their homes to seek employment either on the farms or in the mines around which cities like Johannesburg had sprouted. The black workers were displaced from their rural situation with all it entailed in terms of ideological meaning and support. In towns, all that support was gone and the African was vulnerable to anti-social influences. He felt alienated in the new setup, to which he had not yet adapted. That meant Pentecostalism found easy allies in the form of alienated blacks in urban environments. Those who resorted to drugs, alcohol and prostitution abandoned these vices at the prompting of the Pentecostals. Geoffrey was one of those hundreds of alienated Africans who found meaning in their lives by converting to Pentecostalism. That worked well for all concerned. For industrial capitalism there was a reliable and healthy labour force. A labour force that embraced Christian values was useful. Abandoning beer consumption and drugs meant better health for

workers. In that situation absenteeism and sick leave were minimized. Production and productivity were enhanced.

The racist policies of the National Party, dominated by the Afrikaners, helped to propagate the Pentecostal movement. The black work force was predominantly migrant in character. After the expiry of their contracts, migrant workers returned to their tribal homes in rural areas. As alienated workers in sprawling cities they had come to embrace Pentecostalism. When the workers returned to their homes they took their new-found faith with them, and this is precisely what Geoffrey did. Pentecostalism took root in rural areas as a result of these discriminatory residential and labour practices. Blacks were regarded as having permanent homes in rural areas, and not in urban areas. Local, South African blacks were not the only ones working in mines and other industrial and commercial concerns. Blacks from across South Africa's borders flocked to Johannesburg and other sprawling cities in the hope of landing jobs. Some of the foreign migrant workers came from Lesotho, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique. When these migrant workers returned home they also took with them their new faiths. The flames of Pentecostalism spread along the routes of labour migrancy. Though Geoffrey had, by illegal means, become a 'South African black born in Alexandra', he was in reality a migrant Zimbabwean worker. He embraced Pentecostalism within the context of cold alienation and the estranging environment of industrial Johannesburg. As events would turn out, he ended up going back to Zimbabwe. As was the case with other migrant workers, he exported Pentecostalism in the form of the Assemblies of God.



Many independent churches espousing Pentecostalism sprang up in South Africa. In their multiplicity they shared the common identity marks of Pentecostalism. One of these Pentecostal churches was the Assemblies of God. In South Africa there were a number of these aligned to their countries of origin. For example, there were the American Assemblies of God, the British Assemblies of God and Canadian Pentecostal Assemblies of God. There was also the South African Assemblies of God, which reflected the South African national scenario of racial separation. It was this separation and its parallel structures that nurtured Nicholas Mandlenkosi Hepburn Bhengu, a founder and leader of the Assemblies of God Back to God Crusade. He became a loose spiritual canon that left a legacy of passionate evangelism, but also of strife and schism, within the Zimbabwean church that he personally founded in Highfield, Salisbury in 1959.

### **Assemblies of God Come to South Africa**

Missionaries from North America were instrumental in establishing the Assemblies of God in South Africa. The origins of the church in South Africa are traceable to 1908 when Charles Chawner arrived from Toronto in Canada. Chawner had received baptism in the Holy Spirit. ‘Daddy Chawner’, as he was affectionately known to his adherents, and his English wife Emma became linked with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada. Though initially they were itinerant missionaries they ultimately settled in KwaZulu-Natal at a place called Morgenzon.

During the same year another couple arrived in South Africa. Henry Turney and his wife Anne came from the United States of America. Turney had been a member of the Baptist Church. The

two missionaries worked closely with Hannah James in the Pretoria district where they pioneered the first Pentecostal church congregation. Later they were absorbed by the Pentecostal Mission under George Bowie. The Pentecostal Mission later became the Full Gospel Church that Reverend Bhengu, the man that John Bond, chairman of the Assemblies of God, described as the outstanding African apostle and father-figure, joined. The Turneys and their associate Hannah moved to Mpumalanga where they established a mission station in Doornkop, not far from Middelburg. Meanwhile, at Hot Springs in Arkansas, Pentecostal pastors and churches held a conference, the outcome of which was the coming into being of the Assemblies of God in the United States of America. The Turneys seized the opportunity in 1914 and sought accreditation with the new organization. They were admitted in 1917. Turney proceeded to apply to establish an Assemblies of God in South Africa. His application was lodged with the Department of the Interior. There were advantages in being registered with that particular department. The ministers whose church organizations were registered with the Department of the Interior qualified to become marriage officers and, besides, they were authorized to enter and work in the native reserves.

Once the Assemblies of God was established in South Africa, opportunities presented themselves for more missionaries to come to South Africa to set up more churches. J H Law came from the United States and saw service at Doornkop where the Turneys pioneered evangelising work. The Richards family, comprising Anna, son John and his wife Mabel, also came from the United States of America. The Richards made history in becoming the first people to be appointed missionaries of the Assemblies of God in

South Africa in 1924. Other pioneering missionaries at that time were C J H Bennett and Austin Chawner. In 1930 there was a reorganisation when South Africa became a district of the Assemblies of God in the United States of America. However, the Department of Foreign Missions was not entirely convinced about going ahead with work in South Africa. Their view was that the missions in South Africa should fold and be absorbed by the Full Gospel Church or the Bethel Pentecostal Assembly.

In 1932 the Assemblies of God in South Africa became an autonomous organization, or a national church. This was through consensus with the Assemblies of God in the States. Shortly thereafter, white assemblies were admitted into the Assemblies of God. James Mullan and Louis Potgieter became the first Afrikaner to join the Assemblies of God in 1936. At that time the Assemblies of God in South Africa embraced both white and black assemblies. Control though was in the hands of the missionaries. The period in question saw the rise of powerful, self-confident and independent-minded black men such as Bhengu, Albert Gumede and Gideon Buthelezi. The blacks began to feel they were marginalized and demanded inclusion in the National Executive. Their request was granted and the National Executive then became multi-racial in composition. The move was not popular with the missionaries in South Africa, some of whom joined the Pentecostal Holiness Church. Chawner remained loyal to the Assemblies of God, and he and others brought the American and Canadian Assemblies into a loose organization that concentrated its efforts in the Limpopo Province among the blacks.

In the main, this was the picture within the Assemblies of God at the time when Geoffrey Mkwanzazi joined it. He was required to attend a Bible College in Witbank to equip himself for the challenging task that lay ahead. Not only did Geoffrey acquire the skills needed to spread the message and win souls to Christ, but he also met with the young woman who would win his heart. The two, Eleanor and Geoffrey, would, once out of college and married, work closely together as messengers of God, particularly in Zimbabwe, where they found their calling.

## *Chapter 5*

# **Training For Christian Service**

### **A Life Partner – Eleanor Masombuka**

Eleanor Linky Masombuka was born on 10 October 1937. Her father was Petros Jembe and her mother was Elizabeth Nkabinde. Her paternal grandfather was Paulos, a lay preacher with the Swedish Alliance Mission. Her paternal grandmother, after whom she was named, was Eleanor Mahlangu. Eleanor was born on a Jewish owned farm near Delmas, not far from Witbank, a coal mining town in Mpumalanga. Many people worked on the nearby coal mines, such as Braamfontein. However, her father worked at a nearby petrol filling station. Some blacks had been evicted from the area to create room for mining operations and farms for the whites, like the owner of the farm where the Masombukas lived. That is why there was no chief in this area. Her people were of Nguni stock belonging to the Ndzundza/Nzuza-Manala group. Nguni traditions mention one Mnguni as the founder of the Nguni people, who trekked from the north until they reached the East Coast of present day KwaZulu-Natal. From that general area of settlement the Nguni groups began to move northwards on to the central plateau beyond the Drakensberg Mountains. The first group to move north into the central plateau was the BaFokeng who undertook their migration in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. The Ndzundza/Nzuza-Manala

group moved out in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century under the leadership of Ndebele who was one of the sons of Mnguni – together with Xhosa, Luzumane (Zulu) and Swazi. Ndebele, who broke away from his relatives, died in the Drakensberg Mountains and was succeeded by Mhlanga who settled around Radfontein. Mhlanga was in turn succeeded by Musi who went to Wonderboom, KwaMnyamana. It was from Musi that many would-be distinct groups emerged. His sons were Masombuka, who initially went to Mphaphuli in the land of the VhaVenda but later returned and rejoined the Ndzundza/Nzuza-Manala group. His brothers were Dlomo, Mthombeni, Sikhosana and Mhwaduba. Eleanor’s paternal grandmother was Mahlangu, Ndzundza/Nzuza’s direct line. While those descendants of Mhwaduba and Mthombeni, who settled in the northern parts of Limpopo, lost their culture, those who were in the south retained it, though it also underwent some changes. Their language picked up some Sotho-Tswana words and, later, when the Afrikaners arrived, Afrikaans elements were included in the Nguni language spoken by the Ndzundza/Nzuza-Manala. The history of the Masombukas meant Eleanor and Geoffrey spoke languages that were mutually intelligible. Geoffrey had, for the purposes of identifying with South Africa, shifted from the Ndebele language spoken in Southern Rhodesia to Zulu. In terms of ethnic identity both Eleanor and Geoffrey belonged to the same group – the Ndebele. The two groups were both Nguni; Eleanor’s ancestors were the original Ndebele while Geoffrey’s ancestors under King Mzilikazi adopted the same ethnic name in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century when they passed through Ndzundza/Nzuza-Manala country.

Eleanor started at Braamfontein Government Primary School in 1944, where she remained until she completed Standard 5. She

then went to Delmas Government School for Standard 6. At Delmas she lived with a relative as it was too far to travel daily from her home. The small town had a township for blacks, while the whites lived separately. When she completed primary education, Eleanor enrolled at Brakpan High School where she studied for three years. She had already converted to Christianity by this time. The Swedish Alliance Mission (Swedish Vallhund Alliance (SVA)) was formed in 1853 as a revival movement that swept over Sweden enthusing people in studying the Bible. So high was the interest in the revival that those near the town of Jonkoping formed the Jonkoping Tract Society in 1853. The tracts and small publications were used to spread the message. As the work of the Jonkoping Tract Society increased, more and more people joined their ranks. The result was the formation of the Jonkoping Mission Society in 1861. Realising that the homes that had served as meeting venues were becoming inadequate, chapels were built. The missionary thrust was initiated in 1892 when Swedish-American evangelist Fredrik Franson visited Sweden. Young people became keen on the idea and a Youth Organization was formed in 1892. In 1900 a committee was formed to sponsor and guide the missionary enterprise. The missionaries were sent by the committee to China, India and South Africa. As a result of the merger between Jonkoping Mission Society and the Youth Organisation, the Swedish Alliance (known at the time as the Alliance Church) reached South Africa and ultimately Witbank, where the Masombukas became converts.

### **Spring Valley Bible School**

Eleanor had wanted to become a nurse after completing secondary education. “I always wanted to do nursing. At the same time I

wanted to work for God.” She was a frequent visitor at the nearby hospital where she used to pray for the sick. “I wanted to show God that as a nurse I could still work for Him.” When it was time for sports Eleanor sneaked out of school to go and pray for the sick. In her last year at Brakpan she heard the Lord call upon her to work for Him. Her decision to enter the Bible School at Witbank led to her career in the dedicated service of the Lord. There she would meet Geoffrey, who had also chosen to serve the Lord. Eleanor entered the Spring Valley Bible School in 1957 and was to remain there until 1959 when she and Geoffrey completed their Bible course. The Bible School was run by the Assemblies of God. It, however, admitted students such as Eleanor who came from other church denominations. Eleanor arrived at the start of the new term in January. The following month Geoffrey arrived at the school. He was met at the railway station and driven to the school in a school truck. When he arrived he was dropped at the dining hall. It was almost lunch-time and the students were about to come out of class and go for lunch. Eleanor was among those who came out first. “I saw this man who was wearing a brown suit. I felt my heart beat faster. But I did not know the reason. There was strict separation of boys and girls at the Bible School, though we were in the same class throughout the three years of our stay at the school. In any case, I did not want to get married. I had witnessed strife in marital relationships among black couples. I had had a nasty experience with one couple. The husband, a respected man of God, used to ring a bell to call for attention. The husband dressed smartly but the wife had no clothes to match him. One day the husband went away and left the wife without any money at all. The poor wife approached me to beg for money. Men can be mean and dangerous,” Eleanor related.



On the day of Geoffrey's arrival it was Eleanor's turn to dish out the food in the dining hall. Eleanor was a beautiful young woman and it did not take Geoffrey long to notice her. He saw temptation as the work of Satan and he tried hard to resist, but he felt "a sense of longing, a craving within my heart." *Inhliziyo nwayi, nwayi*, his heart hungered for her.

Spring Valley Bible School was located on a farm belonging to Fred Burke, the school's principal. Geoffrey had the impression that the school was a temporary structure. The dormitory walls were made from 'mampara' bricks, unfired clay. It seemed the school had been built in a hurry. Students brought their own bedding and linen, while the school provided beds. The principal's home, near the school gate, consisted of rondavel structures with grass thatch roofs. White teachers lived separately from their black counterparts, who lived with the students. Even a Christian institution did not escape racist tendencies. Wilson, the white teacher who taught church history, came from America, He specialized in teaching evangelism and winning souls to Christ. There was one Afrikaner teacher, Mr Swart. Among the black staff was Miss Mtshali, who was in charge of the kitchen and dining hall and taught the students how to run Bible schools. Alfred Gumede was a specialist in Hebrew and the five books of the Old Testament (the Pentateuch). Reverend Gumede was a man of the Holy Spirit who was endowed with the gift of speaking in tongues. "Oh, Gumede was a good man, Baba. The Lord made use of him," Geoffrey said about the Zulu man. Gumede was Reverend Bhengu's friend and associate, and together they influenced, in no small measure, the development and ethos of the Assemblies of

God. He had heard about the charismatic Reverend Bhengu while teaching at a Lutheran school in 1931. Gumede then moved to Dumisa where he taught at an Anglican school. It was at that time that he sought salvation in Jesus Christ. Reverend Bhengu got to Dumisa shortly afterwards and heard about Gumede and his being a saved man. The two then entered into correspondence, finally meeting when Gumede went to listen to Reverend Bhengu's sermon. He had always been keen to experience the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. "I felt a heavy hand and its power on me was so heavy it gently pushed me down and I found myself lying down flat on the ground... I rolled to the door where I came to a stop." Gumede shouted and rejoiced. About to cross the Umkomaas River on his way home, "I tried to say goodbye, I began speaking in tongues, a thing I had never heard before."

The teaching staff came from different Christian denominations, though the institution belonged to the Pentecostal Assemblies of God. The school enjoyed good relations with sponsors in America. One form of assistance that the Americans offered was a diesel truck, which the school used to transport students going on training sessions in neighbouring black communities, particularly the mine compounds. This is the truck that brought Geoffrey to the school on his first day.

Essentially, Spring Valley Bible School offered a three year study course in the Bible and related subjects. The students were being prepared for evangelising and pastoral work. Questions such as "Who is Jesus Christ?" and "Why did Jesus Christ die for you?" were asked. Students delved into the doctrines of the church. They also did tenets of Pentecostalism. English was taught, though not as

an examinable subject. Each day started with optional prayers followed by breakfast in the dining hall. The morning meal consisted of maize meal porridge, tea, darkened with brown sugar, and bread. In the afternoon students took part in industrial work, returning to study in the evening before they retired to bed.

The students, most of whom were mature, were asked about their interests and skills and were then allocated subjects accordingly. Geoffrey and a student from Botswana opted for building.

It was important to give the students a grounding in practical work in addition to their theoretical studies. On Sundays the students were given the opportunity to demonstrate their practical skills in evangelical work. The mine and farm workers were free on Sundays and the students took advantage of their availability. The school truck transported the students to their targeted audiences. Mine and farm workers endured harsh conditions at their work places for very little pay. They quite often faced racial insults from their bosses and sometimes even physical beatings. They had been taken away from their rural homes to which they only returned after long absences from family and friends. The social networks that provided company and support had been weakened. Those who had buttressed their spiritual worldview were left behind at home. The workers needed new meaning in their lives in this new industrial and capitalist environment.

Africans were used to leading holistic lives with spiritual, economic, political and social spheres interacting in all aspects of their lives. In other words the Africans needed a kind of spirituality that held the promise of spiritual salvation, physical healing and

material necessities. Fundamentally, the Africans cherished a religion that helped them achieve the all-important goal of attaining continuity and the unendingness of the human species. Spirituality mediated all facets, such as biological attributes, to ensure fertility. Feeling spiritually bereft the workers were open to Christian evangelism, especially to Pentecostal teachings, which are in constant interaction with the African perception of the Afro-centric spirit worldview. There is undoubtedly some parallel between Pentecostalism and some aspects of African Traditional Religion (ATR). The appeal of Pentecostalism lay in its transforming power of the Holy Spirit. The holistic gospel of salvation includes deliverance from all types of oppression such as sickness, sorcery, evil spirits, and poverty. These are conditions that pose a threat to life and therefore to the continuity of the human species. Besides, the Pentecostal evangelists undertook healing and the casting out of demons for no charge. This was attractive to people who received low wages. The new teachings grounded the workers in a new orientation that rendered life more meaningful and worthwhile.

These were the kind of workers that Geoffrey and his fellow preachers targeted every Sunday. The workers prayed with the students and sang with them. “We are all sinners; we are looking for the Saviour. Do you accept the Lord as your Saviour?” Geoffrey recalled those early days when they were being prepared for the challenging task that lay ahead. At Witbank there was a location called KwaGuqa where the trainee pastors got the chance to put into practice their evangelizing skills. The resident pastor produced a report on the performance of the student pastors. The seniors were given a chance to preach while the younger ones worked as

ushers. “We did the best we could under the circumstances,” Geoffrey recalled.

### **Experiencing Outpouring of the Holy Ghost**

For Eleanor the stark differences between her church, the Swedish Alliance, and the Assemblies of God, which was Pentecostal, hit her in the face while at the Bible School. Geoffrey had already embraced the Assemblies of God, while Eleanor had not. In later life the two would march together in Christian faith. For her, Baptism in the Holy Spirit was a new and foreign concept. She witnessed the Evangelicals baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It was at the Bible School that she first witnessed mass prayers. “Though mass prayers were done, I saw no remarkable things then,” recalled Eleanor. During mass prayers people prayed in their mother tongues – Ndebele, Zulu, English and Afrikaans.

“One day I heard people pray in a language that I did not understand. Curiosity got the better of me. I opened my eyes to see and witness this phenomenon. What is the reason behind all this? Why?” Eleanor remembered thinking. One morning Reverend Gumede gave a moving sermon in the chapel and Eleanor was keen to get to know, and, if possible, experience, the new phenomenon. She felt a thirst, a kind of yearning for the Holy Spirit. Reverend Gumede reminded his audience of the verse in Acts, Chapter 2 when Jesus spoke to his disciples. The key and seminal word was power. The disciples were going to get power to be his witnesses. “It is important to get power to be a witness of the Lord,” boomed the eloquent man of God.

Reverend Gumede went on to explain how different people react to the presence of the Holy Spirit. Some fall to the ground, yet others begin to speak in unknown tongues. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you anytime anywhere,” charged the fired Reverend Gumede. He spoke about the upper room where the apostles spoke in tongues when the Holy Spirit was upon them. That was the day of Pentecost. Reverend Gumede offered more advice regarding the Holy Spirit. “It is good to fast and pray if the Holy Spirit is to come upon you.” Eleanor was now equipped with what it would take to entice the Holy Spirit to make a visitation.

“It was on a Tuesday morning when I fasted for the first time in my life in order for the Holy Spirit to descend upon me. I drank no water and ate no food. While the Reverend Gumede was preaching I do not know what happened. He was speaking in another tongue. There was a commotion, *inhlokomo esingayazi*, which lasted for half a day. There was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit until lunchtime. I suddenly felt weak though my brain was all right. I felt as if I was in another country.” For Eleanor this was a great step towards understanding and embracing the Pentecostal phenomenon of the Holy Spirit. “In my heart I want to thank Reverend Gumede who exposed me to the phenomenon.” It was indeed a small step into the realm of spirituality and a great leap towards a life of Pentecostal witness, a spiritual disposition that would bring her closer to Geoffrey, culminating in their marriage and march in tandem in the service of the Lord.

It was during a second session that she experienced total control by the Holy Spirit. “I wanted to go up to Reverend Gumede. I felt as if I was drunk. I was not in charge of my faculties. I went and offered

my hand to him. Instead of speaking in Ndebele, I spoke in another tongue. Reverend Gumede held my outstretched hand and laughed. I cried.” Eleanor had experienced the power of the Holy Spirit and that was the day she considered that she met the Lord. From that moment she became a Pentecostal. The powerful evangelist Reverend Gumede was invited to preach during the conventions of the Swedish Alliance. Eleanor decided to remain within her Swedish Alliance Church and waited for more people to receive the Holy Spirit within that church. In her view, the Holy Spirit was not confined to a particular church. The Holy Spirit could fall upon anyone who so desired.

There were instances when she experienced the Holy Spirit as she gave witness within the Swedish Alliance Church. One day in Swaziland she took charge of a Sunday service. Choruses were sung and lots of people came along to attend the service. Many wondered how such a small girl could lead a service and do it so well. Suddenly, there was an uneasy calm within the church and the congregants sensed that they were in danger and began to talk in hushed tones. Many workers from Swaziland, particularly its young men, like those of many neighbouring countries, went to work in Johannesburg. Social conditions in the golden city turned some of the youths into social misfits with violent dispositions. They were called *otsotsi* or *amalayitha* who caused terror within their communities. Their language was foul and they engaged in drug abuse and drinking illicit alcohol. Muggings and theft were their stock in trade. Many such youngsters ended up at Number 4 Remand Prison where Geoffrey took the bold decision to walk in the ways of the Lord. A group of young men advanced towards the people gathered to worship. Eleanor, although engrossed in the

sermon, knew there was a showdown looming. She had to think fast and rely on the intervention of the Lord. This was a good test for her. “Today the wrong people have turned up,” people began to whisper. Eleanor said, “I was lost for an appropriate response. I was terrified. I watched as their leader came sauntering down the aisle. His big eyes were red and sent a message of horror. I then thought, Jesus Christ died for them as well. I decided I was not going to end the meeting. Suddenly, I felt all the fear that had gripped me let go of me. I saw the moment of reckoning approach with every crushing step the leader of the gang took. He was heading straight towards me. There was a table that separated him from me. Just before the leader got to the table a strange thing happened. They all fell down. As if that was not enough, some of the congregants started speaking in tongues. That was something that the Lord did for us. We do not know what the thugs saw. God has been good, Baba.”

Even the missionaries who had retired to sleep came and found the Lord was in charge. “What is happening Eleanor?” they enquired. They were taken aback by what was happening in a church that did not embrace, let alone experience, Pentecostal traits. She discovered that some members of their church had had similar experiences but they kept a secret of them. More and more blacks experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit and this made the missionaries feel at liberty to mention their own experiences without a sense of guilt or shame.

Eleanor was seized with the idea of going to serve the Lord in Southern Rhodesia. She found inspiration in the explorer and missionary Dr David Livingstone. “These missionaries left their



homes thousands of kilometres away to serve in Africa. Why can't I? And now there is this young man from the Federation," she said in reference to Geoffrey who had stolen her heart. The Federation Eleanor was referring to came into being in 1953 when the three territories of Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland came together to form the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. It was an economic as well as political arrangement, established in response to the coming to power of the Afrikaner National Party in South Africa. The new Federation would provide a market for British goods while at the same time providing primary resources for British overseas industries.



Eleanor's grandfather Oupa Paulos Masombuka.



Eleanor's father Petros Jembe Masombuka.



Eleanor's father behind the steering wheel of a DKW Car



Eleanor during her school days.



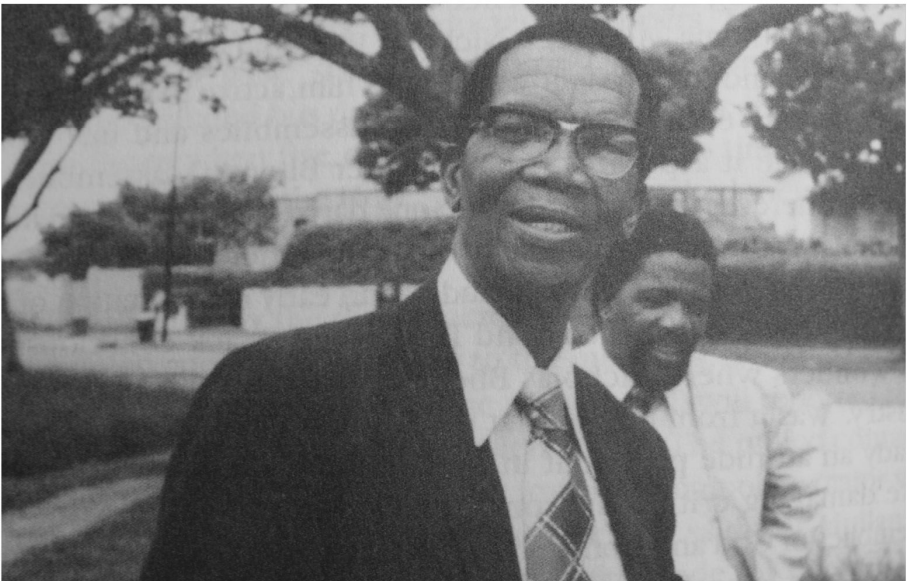
Eleanor during the time she was attending Brakpan School in Witbank



Eleanor during the time she was attending Brakpan School in Witbank



From left: Alfred Gumedede, Nicholas Bhengu and Gideon Buthelezi (*John Bond 2000*)



Nicholas Bhengu with Fred Shabalala in the background. (*John Bond 2000*)



Final Year at Spring Valley Bible School 1959. Geoffrey 3rd from left, back row. Eleanor seated 2nd from right.



Eleanor with a friend.



Eleanor preaching with a translator.

# African Bible Training Institute

Witbank, Transvaal.

Confers this

## Diploma of Graduation

upon Geoffrey B. Mkwanzu

*For having successfully completed the three year course of Bible study  
prescribed by the Institute.*

*In witness whereof we affixed our signatures on the*

10th day of December 1959

A. W. Burke  
*Principal.*

A. H. L. Gumma

## *Chapter 6*

# **Till Death Do Us Part**

Spring Valley Bible School was a place of spiritual empowerment. The institution equipped its charges with evangelical capacity and moral rectitude to undertake the work of the Lord. Men and women came from all corners of South Africa to drink from the valley of Biblical wisdom. At the same time, the institution brought together potential couples of like mind and spiritual disposition. Institutional regulations were stiff – there was to be no social interaction between boys and girls. But where there is love, there is a will and a way. From the very outset Geoffrey had been attracted to Eleanor. Although the attraction he felt was strong his mind advised caution and reminded his erotic inclinations that he had come to train as an evangelist and not to appease the spirit of Cupid.

At the outset Eleanor had mixed feelings about Geoffrey. Although attracted to him, she thought that perhaps he was a married man due to his age and felt a little relieved as she was not really convinced she wanted to get married. She had seen women in marriages being abused by their husbands. “*Amadoda ayagqilaza,*” she used to imagine. She felt that women could be enslaved by marriage. At the Bible School Eleanor had thought about the nuns who she saw as women serving the Lord. She was not keen to be a nun, in much the same way she was not keen to be a housewife.



“To be a nun is to be enslaved. I love my freedom.” Eleanor recalled a conversation with Sister Elsie, a nurse by profession, who lived in Durban.

“God is worried.”

“Why, Sister Elsie?”

“He can’t find young girls like Mary who are prepared to live for the Lord.”

“Not me Sister, I have made up my mind.”

While at the Bible School Eleanor needed a pen but she had no money, so she prayed hard to the Lord. The response, positive and encouraging, came through Geoffrey who offered her the pen that she had sorely needed. The pen and a letter that Geoffrey wrote to Eleanor were to be the subject of a school board of inquiry that ultimately cost Geoffrey the honour to speak on behalf of the graduates at the end of 1959 when his group completed their training.

While Geoffrey generally spent the school holidays continuing the work of the Lord in Johannesburg, Eleanor went to her parental home to spend the holidays with her family. Her father, who operated a small grocery shop, owned a dark blue *Fargo* van. He ordered items for the shop at Kendall, which was nearer than Witbank. The family lived at Stella near Brakfontein coal mine. His customers were mine workers and people who lived in nearby reserves. The Jewish family who owned the farm where the Masombukas lived grew vegetables, having a large crop field, and Eleanor’s father bought some for sale at his grocery shop, notably lettuce and cucumber. The Masombuka family had a windmill on

their property, where they kept a large herd of cattle that included milk cows. There was plenty of both fresh and sour milk, *amasi*.

Tall, heavily built and very light in complexion, Eleanor's father was a jack of all trades, though a shoe-maker by profession. Eleanor's mother was also very light in complexion, a trait she inherited from her own mother, MaNkabinde. The local chief was Mahlangu, and common surnames in the area included the following: Mabhena, Mahlangu, Mguni, Sikhosana, Mtsweni, Masango, and Manabo.

### **Confronting a Jewish Family**

Eleanor had read in the Bible about Jewish people being God's chosen people and that the rest of the people were Gentiles. She had also learned that Jews had rejected Jesus and persecuted him. Furthermore, the Jews were still waiting for the Messiah. One morning Eleanor told her mother that she was going to confront the Jewish family. Lionel Herscovitz was one of the richest farmers in the vicinity and he had erected good brick houses for his workers.

"Good morning," Eleanor greeted Lionel who responded warmly.

"God has sent me to you," continued Eleanor.

On hearing the word God, Lionel removed his hat. Eleanor opened her heart to him as he held her by the hand. Lionel asked Eleanor to visit his home where they could talk further.

Eleanor went to the family's homestead where she met workers, some of whom knew her.

"Where is the Missus?" she inquired. She was led into the house where Lionel's wife was in the company of other Jewish women.

“May I see you please?” requested Eleanor and suggested they speak privately.

“I bring you this message about Jesus.”

The two embraced and wept uncontrollably. The other women then came to see what was happening. At that moment Lionel arrived in the house and, upon seeing his wife weeping, he led her away. He asked the other ladies to go and sit down. On returning to the room, Lionel led Eleanor to the drawer where he kept some cash, which he then offered to her. She declined the offer arguing, “I was sent by God.”

“Can I offer you some tea?” Eleanor had been fasting since morning following Reverend Gumede’s advice and enjoyed the tea and biscuits served on beautiful china.

The Jewish family got to know that the strange God-loving black lady was Petros’ daughter. “I do not believe she is Petros’ daughter at all. She must have white blood in her veins,” said Lionel. This was the family that would offer their sleek *Cadillac* to transport the groom and his bride on Eleanor and Geoffrey’s wedding day. Not only did they offer their prized car, but they put their driver at the service of the couple. The same family offered five sheep for slaughter during the festivities.

During one school holiday the Principal pitched a tent at Leslie near Strella. Eleanor had got wind that her school-mate was preaching nearby where there was a revival crusade. Eleanor’s father decided that they would attend the revival. Eleanor’s mother had a medical problem, so by going to the service they hoped that she would be prayed for and in the process healed. Geoffrey preached and then prayed for the sick. He placed his hands on Eleanor’s mother’s head. The problem that Eleanor’s mother had

been experiencing with bleeding stopped. “Eleanor’s mother was sick and was among the people that I prayed for. That was not known to me at the time,” said Geoffrey about the day he prayed for the healing of his would-be mother-in-law.

This was an important meeting between Geoffrey and his future in-laws. When Eleanor’s father later experienced a dream concerning ‘this boy from Rhodesia’, it was a face he had already seen. In the dream he saw Geoffrey wearing a shirt and no jacket. He heard a voice saying, “Masombuka, Masombuka, *nans’ indodana yakho.*” Masombuka, Masombuka, here is your son. Before Eleanor left on a trip to Sweden she had confided in her parents. “I am seeking your prayers. I don’t know how to put the issue across to you. There is this Rhodesian Mkwanazi boy. I ask for your prayers. I have something to tell you. I don’t know what will happen to me,” narrated Eleanor. Her father had responded, “I don’t want a boy coming here to marry my daughter. Let the Lord reveal him to me.” Indeed, the Lord had done just that by showing him ‘his son’ in a dream. Little did Eleanor know that her father already knew about the issue. Several letters addressed to Eleanor had arrived at her father’s grocery shop and one of them had come from Geoffrey. Eleanor’s paternal grandmother was not keen on Eleanor getting married to a Rhodesian man. To support her viewpoint she cited many instances when South African women married Rhodesian men, only to discover that the men had wives back home in Southern Rhodesia. This had happened to their neighbour, a Masango girl, who was forced to return to South Africa after being ill-treated by her Southern Rhodesian husband. Eleanor’s father stood by her. “My daughter, do not believe stories that we hear.” To Masombuka, Geoffrey was a son and he treated

him as such. When Masombuka died, he even left some cattle to Geoffrey in his will, something quite unheard of.

### **The Letter Saga**

During one of the school vacations Geoffrey decided to visit his parents back in Bulawayo. As Geoffrey had been unable to express his affection to Eleanor openly while at the school he decided to write to her. The nearest Geoffrey had come to saying how he felt was to give her the ball-point pen. The letter was somewhat vague, a general rather than a specific one in matters of love. The letter was sent to Strella where Eleanor was spending the school holidays. Geoffrey wrote a kind of brother to sister letter laced with hidden intentions. Geoffrey had inquired how the work of the Lord was progressing. He signed himself off in the same theme: "Yours in Christ." The letter arrived at Eleanor's parental home when she had already returned to college. The letter was redirected to her. The school authorities received the letter and became suspicious. The handwriting resembled that of Geoffrey who was in his final year at the Bible School.

The authorities at the school were even more puzzled to note that the letter bore a Southern Rhodesian postal stamp. Reverend Gumede became curious. He decided to open the letter. The two students were summoned by the no-nonsense Reverend. "You two are writing letters to each other and proposing," asserted the Reverend. "No, I was greeting her," responded Geoffrey. Reverend Gumede was incensed. "Are you two in love?" he asked. "No, not at all. It's me who has an interest in her. I did not propose. If I had a chance, I probably would have proposed," answered Geoffrey with confidence. A board of inquiry was instituted with some of its

members coming from as far as Brakpan near Springs. It became clear that there were varying stand-points among the members of the board due to their different cultural backgrounds. The whites were not unduly perturbed by letters exchanged between the two. It looked quite normal and innocent to them. This was not the case with the African members of the board, least of all Reverend Gumede, the Zulu man.

“Eleanor is in possession of a ball-point pen that she claims she was given by you. What do you say to the charge?” Geoffrey had indeed given Eleanor the pen in response to her prayer. “Yes, I did give her a pen,” responded Geoffrey.

“Why did you give her a pen?” came the retort.

“I was saved by her.”

Eleanor was asked to give her side of the story concerning the pen.

“I did not have a pen. I prayed that someone would give me a pen. When he gave me one, it was a prayer answered.” Reverend Gumede continued to fire questions. This time he directed his volley at Eleanor.

“Do you think Masombuka would be happy to hear the board sat to deliberate over your and Geoffrey’s case?” No response.

The white members of the board chastised Reverend Gumede for opening the letter in the first place. Wilson, the young man from America, in particular, was not amused with the overzealousness of the conservative Zulu man. It was the board’s decision that the letters did not warrant the expulsion of the two. However, due to the furore over the letter, Reverend Gumede shelved his intention to ask Geoffrey, who had passed all subjects with flying colours, to speak during the graduation. Instead, a fellow student, Phumani, took his place. Graduation day came at the end of 1959. “I was not

in love, but the feeling for the ‘Rhodesian boy’ certainly was there,” recalled Eleanor. Geoffrey was on her mind and, when she left for Sweden on her first overseas trip, she sent him a card.

### **Qualified and Working for the Lord**

Geoffrey was now well equipped to do the work of the Lord. After graduating from the Spring Valley Bible School, the Lord said he should go to Alexandra. Immediately after graduating he went to live with the Dlomos, whose church was at Orlando, a township in Soweto, not very far from the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital. His first assembly was at George Kog between the Railways and City Deep Mine. There were lively revivals at George Kog where there was an assembly for young persons. A Mrs Mashaba trained and conducted a choir that sang beautifully. One day there was a youth rally service at Thembisa where members from other townships were present. Also present was Reverend Bhengu who was then based in East London. It was during this revival at Thembisa that the charismatic Reverend Bhengu spotted Geoffrey and realized he had a gift to start new assemblies. Geoffrey had started George Kog from scratch and with the assistance of Mrs Mashaba he had turned it into a vibrant assembly that made its mark in the Johannesburg area.

It was contact with Reverend Bhengu that would make a lasting impact on, and shape, the evangelistic career of Geoffrey. On that fateful day, Geoffrey would not have known that he would share precious time with the Reverend Bhengu in crusades in KwaZulu-Natal. Nor could he have foreseen that he would be chosen by the Reverend Bhengu to carry forward the work that the Reverend Bhengu pioneered in Southern Rhodesia in 1959. As the anointed

successor to Reverend Bhengu's work in Southern Rhodesia, Geoffrey would face mounting resistance to his leadership and be nominated by the Reverend Nicholas Bhengu to undertake a trip to America as a cooling off period. Little did Geoffrey know that he would find himself entangled in church strife and a schism that followed the death of Reverend Bhengu. And he did not know he would stand next to Reverend Bhengu's grave on the day the remains of his mentor were interred at Pietermaritzburg. For Geoffrey his horizons opened up following his teaming up with Reverend Bhengu.

Geoffrey faced opposition and hostility from the local community concerning his baptism of children. The view of the local community was that children should be blessed and not baptized. They argued that as a child Simon went to the Temple where he was blessed. At the age of thirty he went to the River Jordan where he was baptized by Apostle John. They argued that churches that baptized children were not following the scriptures. The agitated community accused Geoffrey of heresy and his activities were reported to the local authority. They even mulled over the idea of evicting him from the township. "I was prepared to stand my ground," Geoffrey said.

The real challenge for Geoffrey came when he took charge of the Alexandra Assembly. The township was dominated by two contending gangs. One belonged to Msoni and was in charge of the area bordered by 9<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> Avenues. The other gang, known as the Spoilers, held sway in the section of the township between 1<sup>st</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Avenues. Geoffrey's office and church was on 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The gangsters caused terror and havoc within the community.



They were feared and some people, notably businessmen, paid protection fees. The gangs looted stores for cigarettes and beer. There had been instances when gang members ripped open girls' wombs with a knife. The gangsters ruled supreme and had no respect for life.

This is the place to which the Lord sent Geoffrey. Reverend Bhengu had told him about the place and that it was infested with diseases. Geoffrey was nonetheless convinced the Lord wanted him to serve Him precisely at such a place. Reverend Bhengu asked Ndzishe, Ishmael Pege and Makhubela to accompany Geoffrey to Alexandra. The church was on 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue and was run by Pastor Malehlaba who was not in the good books of Reverend Bhengu. Pastor Malehlaba wanted to be independent and collect offerings with which he could buy sugar. He thus asked Geoffrey to organize crusades on Saturday afternoons. On Sundays the resident pastor was in charge. Visiting evangelists could use the venue on Mondays and Tuesdays. The church was bursting at the seams on these days.

The gangsters in Alexandra were a real threat to the people going home from the evening revivals. There were two services each day. From 7.00 to 8.00 pm there was a crusade in Malehlaba's iron shack on 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue and from 8.30 to 10.00 pm there were open-air crusades that attracted large crowds that sang and gave praise to the Lord. *'The blood of the lamb has power'* was the song that reverberated through the dark streets of Alexandra. Geoffrey rejoiced that the power of the Lord saw the gangsters who had terrorized the township vanish from the scene. Some came to seek the Lord while others simply kept their distance. "The Lord sprayed his blood that brought salvation to many," remembered Geoffrey. The Assemblies of God church building in Alexandra is

now the biggest on the Reef. The church purchased a factory structure with a basement and converted it into a church building. Adjoining stands were also bought and consolidated into the church complex, in particular for parking purposes.

### **Eleanor Invited to Sweden**

After graduation Eleanor did not stay at home. She travelled extensively – to Swaziland, the Transvaal and Johannesburg, where there were churches in Germiston and Springs. At one time she was invited by the youth in Sweden to visit them. The young people had heard about Eleanor and her evangelistic vibrancy. At the time there were few African girls in the Swedish Alliance. Eleanor was certainly one of the first. The Swedish youth were curious to see what the black girl was made of. She went to Jan Smuts International Airport (now Oliver Tambo International Airport). Her parents and close relatives came to bid her farewell. Her uncle was apprehensive about the whole idea of flying in an aircraft. He said to Eleanor's father, "Jembe, Mhambo, if you do not want this girl, give her to me. Where have you ever heard that one travels aboard a bird that flies above our heads?" The Swedish Alliance missionaries who lived in Johannesburg had assisted her with the necessary travel documents. In Johannesburg Eleanor came face to face with South Africa's racist practices. Blacks and whites used different facilities such as toilets, trains, buses, waiting rooms and restaurants. Black people were barred from entering premises bearing the prohibition 'Nie Blankes' and on one occasion she entered a restaurant with this sign, and, although she was not chased away from the premises, she did receive unwelcoming facial expressions. From Johannesburg she flew with South African Airways to Copenhagen, where she took

Scandinavian Air Services (SAS) to Stockholm. Eleanor was quite confident despite the fact that she was unaccompanied.

In Sweden Eleanor lived at the missionaries' home called Kortebo, in Jonkoping. Before she got on with her main business a welcome party for her was thrown. The various assemblies in Jonkoping were invited to the function. Many came to see a black woman as in those days there were not that many black people in Sweden. Eleanor was struck by the eating habits of the people. "Those people eat, Baba!" Her friend in Sweden was Irene Johansson who later married a German pastor Steiger. Irene accompanied her during her sermons and translated her words from English to Swedish. Their trips included destinations outside Jonkoping. During one of her numerous services where she was guest speaker there was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and many who were present spoke in foreign tongues, though no one was observed to fall down.

Eleanor enjoyed her time in Sweden and loved the snow. "I liked the snow part of it as it was something I was seeing for the first time. I tried my hand at skiing," recalled Eleanor.

### **Engagement and Marriage**

The pioneering trip that Eleanor made to Sweden was to prove a boon to Eleanor and Geoffrey when the two visited together after their marriage. While in Sweden, Eleanor had been in touch with the principal of a Bible School in Darlana in the town of Orsa and when the couple married the principal sent them a congratulatory card. The principal, already a friend of the couple's, offered them a

scholarship. All that was required of them was to get air tickets to Sweden.

Geoffrey and Eleanor got engaged on 30 September 1962. Eleanor had bought an engagement ring for Geoffrey in Johannesburg. But before they got engaged *amalobolo* were paid. Eleanor's father called his wife and daughter aside to ask how many head of cattle he should charge Geoffrey's emissaries. "Do not overcharge him," responded Eleanor's mother. "He has no relatives here, besides, he is a minister who earns little," she continued. "So what do you suggest I charge them?" asked Eleanor's father. She did not make any suggestion. Eleanor's father remembered the dream that he had had, "here is your son." He went on to suggest a money equivalent to the herd he had in his mind. "Here ends the story," he said as he took leave of both his wife and daughter. At that moment Eleanor's father called his father Paulos and his younger brother to announce his decision. Paulos suggested a large figure that his son did not go along with. "No father, I'm not selling a daughter."

The figure agreed by Eleanor's father and mother, and herself, carried the day. The guests were served with tea and biscuits from a recipe that Eleanor had acquired in Sweden during the visit in 1960. The delegation sent by Geoffrey had money with them equivalent to three beasts and that little money was enough to cover what Eleanor's father had asked for. Negotiations were a matter for men and during the proceedings Eleanor's mother, now sobbing, stayed in her kitchen. Asked later why she was crying, responded, "It was then that I realized that my daughter was gone for sure."

A bus-load of well wishers from Alexandra went to witness the engagement. The young girls on the trip were driven by curiosity to see his intended wife and why Geoffrey preferred to become engaged to a farm girl, rather than one of them from the big city. “What does the girl look like, that Reverend Mkwanazi can fall head over heels for her?” was the tone of the enquiries. The shy and quiet Eleanor observed that her own family was happy with her choice. Pastor Stig Bergman of the Pentecostal church was in charge of the proceedings. A board member of the Spring Valley Bible School was in attendance, he had gone ahead to pay *amalobolo* to Eleanor’s parents. There was a big church service conducted by Pastor Mabhena. The Swedish Alliance missionaries were happy for the couple. News of the engagement was carried by several newspapers. Headlines included, “Two evangelists engaging, who is going to do the cooking?” Newspapers in Sweden also carried the story of their engagement.

Five months later the wedding bells tolled when Geoffrey and Eleanor were joined in holy matrimony. The church service was held at Springs on the Eastern Reef where the Swedish Alliance had a church. The church building was neat, with plastered walls painted lily white and a roof of zinc sheets. In addition to this main church building there were a number of rondavels under thatch. Within the church there were benches where congregants sat with no gender separation. On the day of the wedding a number of rascals sat at the back of the church, but, despite a few anxious moments, when their presence was noticed, the ceremony went well.

Eleanor had been an asset to the Swedish Alliance Church and her departure did not please some of the church members, particularly when they realized she was joining the Assemblies of God. After the wedding the newlyweds and their guests proceeded to Strella. Along the path to the venue for the celebrations the stones had been painted white and willow trees lined the way. A huge tent was pitched where all the proceedings took place. Reverend Johan Karlson, who had helped Eleanor secure travel documents when she visited Sweden, was in charge of the celebrations. A large crowd was in attendance. Eleanor had sent wedding invites to all the missionaries that she had worked with. Many members of the Swedish Alliance Mission asked the Lord to forgive them as they had been angry with her. They had hoped Eleanor was going to be one of their flowers, a girl who would give her life to the Lord. Several Swedish boys had proposed to her. “Why Eleanor, do you think we can’t pay dowry? I am prepared to pay double,” said one young man itching to win her hand in marriage. The wedding couple’s driver was a young man from Filabusi in Southern Rhodesia. A long convoy of cars left Springs for Strella. Among the guests at Strella was Ndzishe. Mabhena from Southern Rhodesia was one of the groom’s assistants. The bride and groom had not had time to practice their dances but despite this there was much singing, dancing, feasting and jubilation.

In Alexandra Geoffrey rented a house belonging to the Deacon of the Mahon Mission, who owned a farm beyond Kroonstad in the Orange Free State. After the wedding, Misheck drove the married couple to a farm where they experienced a prelude to the honeymoon that effectively took place in Sweden. It was then time to return to the Orlando Mission house. The people there did not

know the bride and they were curious to see the farm girl who their evangelist had chosen as his marriage partner. “One by one they came to see her,” recalled Geoffrey. The curious visitors whispered that Eleanor was not of their church, that is of the Assemblies of God. “The Assemblies of God had saved people, but not the Swedish Alliance Mission,” they argued.

The second leg of the wedding took place in Bulawayo. The function was organized by Reverend Brymo of the Swedish Alliance Mission. Reverend Brymo ran a bookstore in 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue that later relocated to Bulawayo’s Central Business District. Geoffrey’s siblings, Ruth and Christopher, were in attendance, together with their mother.



Eleanor Masombuka with her interpreter during her first visit to Sweden.

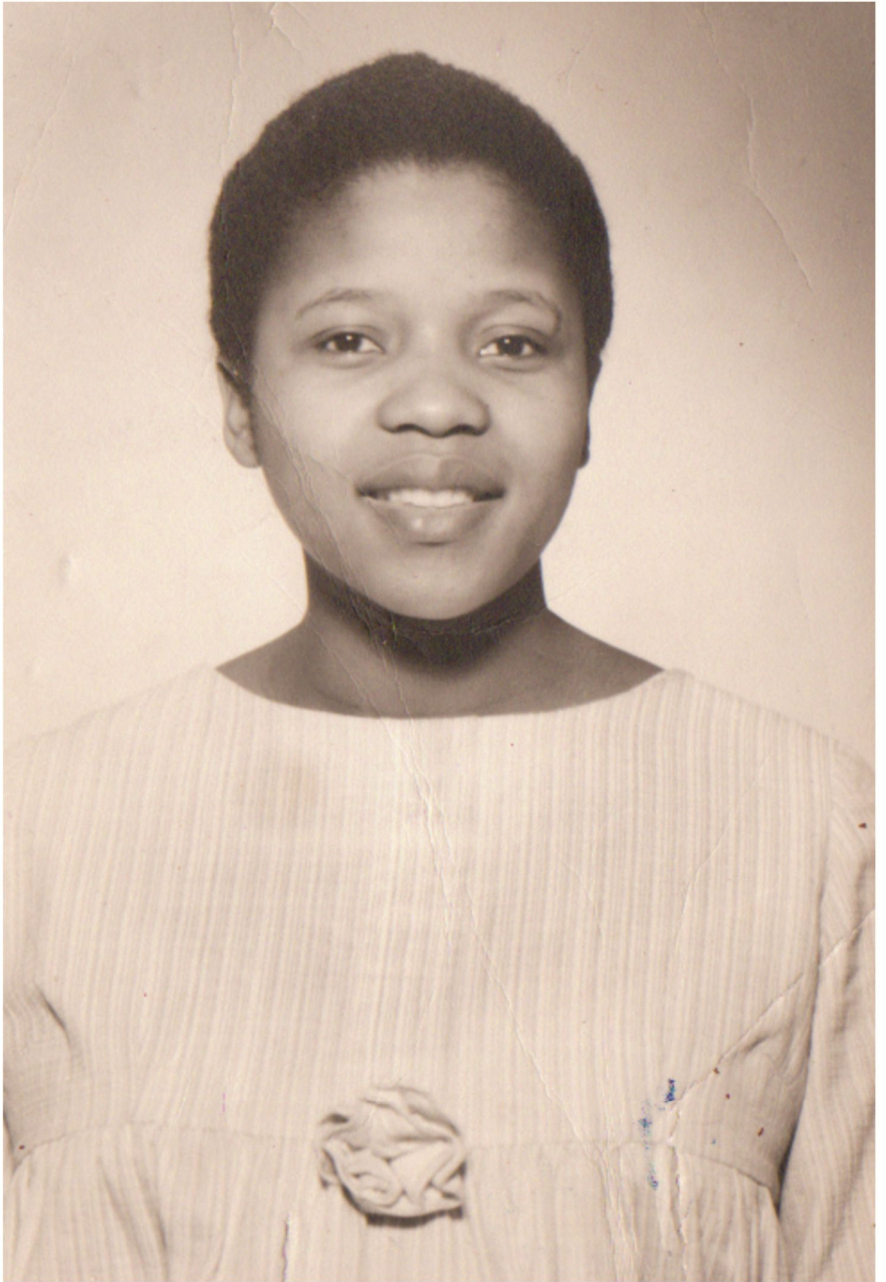


Eleanor and friends playing in snow in Sweden.



Eleanor and friends playing in Sweden.





Eleanor



The Wedding



Eleanor and Geoffrey in Athens en route to Sweden



Eleanor pregnant with first child.



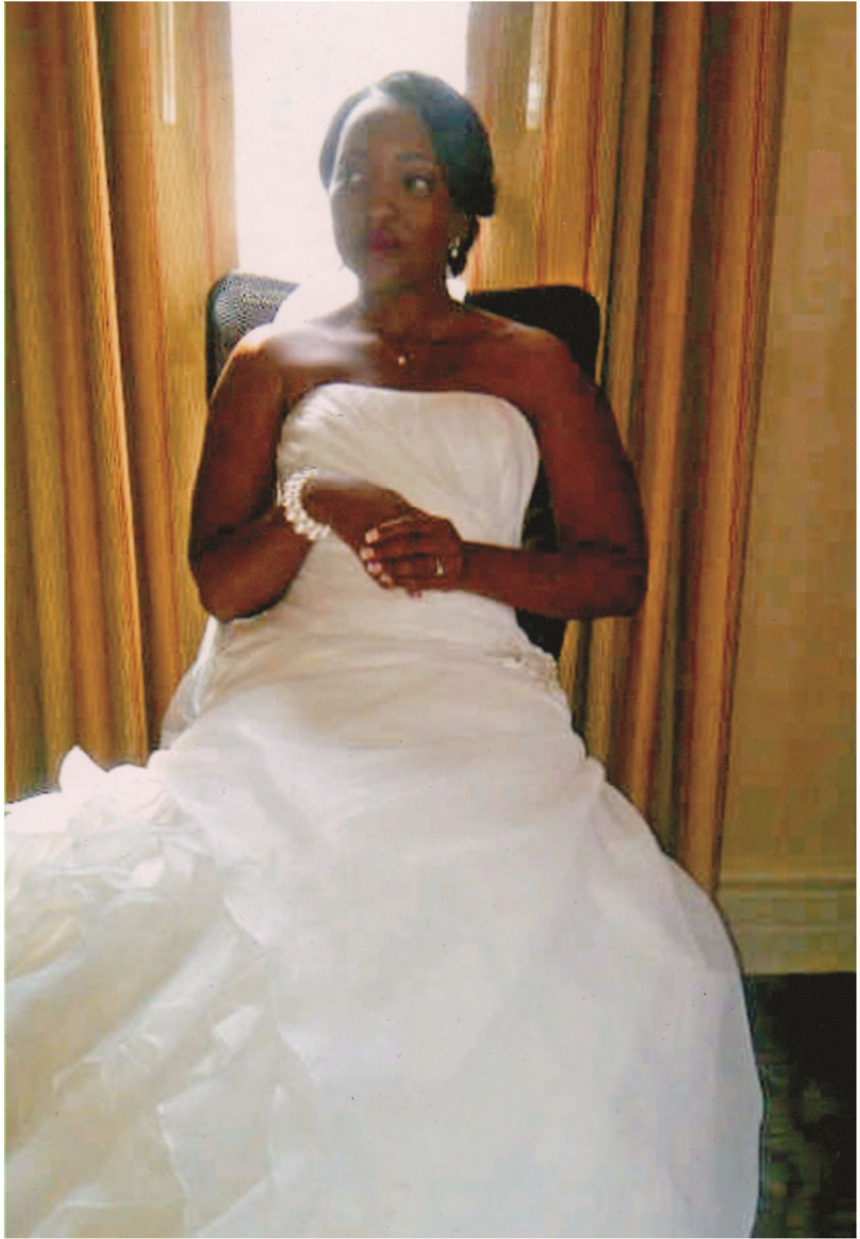
First baby, Noliqwa



Second born son, Oswald Mandlenkosi



Oswald Mandlenkosi



Gugulami, Oswald's daughter on her wedding day





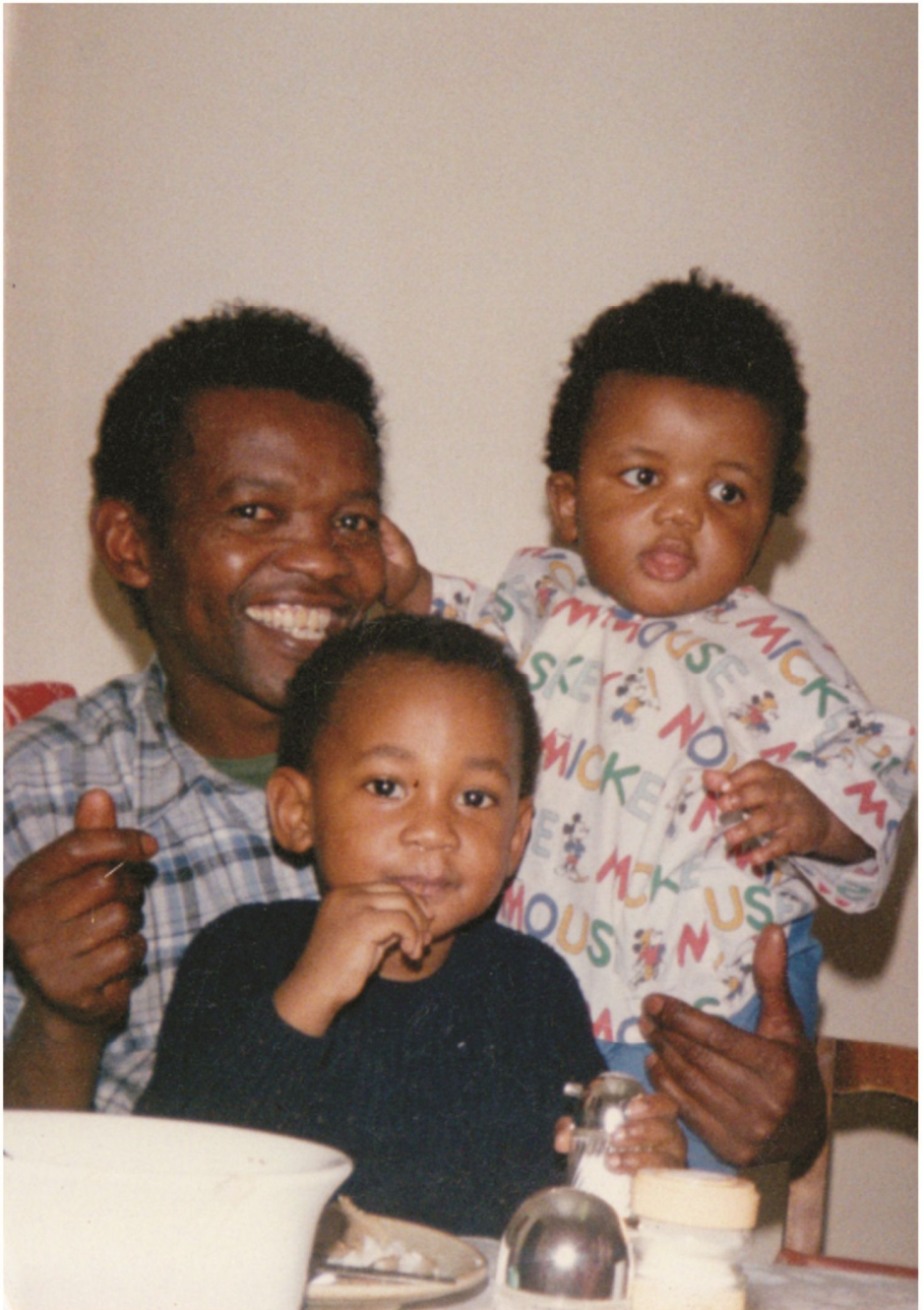
Noliqhwa



Wedding Day, Noliqhwa and Joram Ndiweni



Noliqhwa and daughter Michelle



Joram and two sons, Marshall and Cecil Lingwe



Geoffrey and siblings

## Chapter 7

# Geoffrey and Eleanor Visit Sweden

When the idea of a two year scholarship to enter a Bible School in Sweden came up, Geoffrey could not resist the temptation. However, there was one big challenge – securing airfares for the two of them. The Assemblies of God was not particularly keen to assist. “He has married an outsider, from the Swedish Alliance Mission and now he wants to go to Sweden. Does he want to work with the Swedes?” they remonstrated. Evangelist Reverend Bhengu was not keen to lose such a new-found asset and proved not to be of much assistance either. Eleanor was keen that Geoffrey should meet some of her friends in Sweden. Geoffrey wanted to further his education and the trip would afford him a chance to see new places. Before Geoffrey married Eleanor, an Assembly at Norwood had come to his rescue by giving him a monthly stipend. In charge at the Norwood Assembly was a young white pastor by the name of Douglas Fisher. Geoffrey shared their predicament with Pastor Fisher who lent them enough money to secure one-way tourist tickets from Trek Airways. The loan was to be paid back in three months. The plane made several stopovers along the way so that the tourists could sightsee.

### **A Time to Tour**

Eleanor and Geoffrey boarded the plane at Jan Smuts International Airport. The captain announced when the aircraft overflew Lake Kariba at the border between Southern Rhodesia and Northern Rhodesia (soon to become Zambia following the granting of independence by Britain in 1964). The plane landed at Entebbe Airport in Kampala where the passengers spent the night. There were many Afrikaners on the flight who felt segregated. Uganda had become independent and Milton Obote was the new leader. “This is our country, come forward,” yelled the Ugandans to the few black people on the flight. “I was blessed,” said Eleanor about the experience at the hands of fellow blacks. “Blacks first. This is your country.” “All weapons, all passports here!” came the instructions from the black officers. The Afrikaners surrendered their weapons. “We had none on our persons,” remembered Eleanor. “For once our colour helped us. We got the best rooms.” There were five blacks on the flight. Eleanor and Geoffrey, together with other passengers were booked into the Hilton Hotel, a spectacular high rise building. In the evening the two of them took a walk along the streets of Kampala. They enjoyed the sweet scents of cooking rice and spices. The two had no money so all they could do was sniff the scents and leave it at that. On the following morning the passengers who had been whisked to hotels in the city were brought back to board the plane for the next leg.

Driving through the streets of Kampala was a hellish experience. Cars blew their horns and accidents were common. From Kampala the aircraft flew to Cairo in Egypt where they spent two nights. They were booked into the noisy high rise Nile Hotel. The airline staff had forewarned passengers, “Be careful. Some people are

cunning. You need to be extra careful.” At the hotel well trained staff served dinner, which was a prolonged affair. For starters they were offered avocado pear that looked like a main course. Then came black coffee served in small cups. It was coffee after coffee. Two Americans who shared the table with them were on the uncouth side and totally devoid of table etiquette. They shouted across the table at the top of their voices. “We were under the impression all whites were civilized. How wrong we were.” The main meal was then served, taking almost an hour to be done with. After that came a trolley bursting to the seams with cakes and more coffee and tea. They then had the opportunity to see Cairo at night by going up to a high floor from which they got a good view of the city.

From Cairo, the next leg of the flight took them to Athens in Greece. There, once again, Eleanor and Geoffrey experienced the ritual of being served food the western way. The whole process lasted quite a while. The waiters were slow, and brought the appetizers before coming back to take orders for the main course. After the main course there were sweets, followed by tea or coffee with cake. For Eleanor and Geoffrey the most memorable experience in Greece was to visit the site where Apostle Paul preached. They saw the steps of the building where he stood to preach to the multitudes, the ruins still standing. After the Biblical experience, it was time to go and re-board the peripatetic plane, this time en route to Germany’s Hamburg. On arrival at Hamburg the ever grateful passengers clapped their hands in appreciation of the pilot’s soft landing. From that city Trek Airways proceeded to England. The next leg of the trip was by train and ferry to Copenhagen, the capital city of Denmark. The long and arduous



journey had taken its toll on Eleanor who had caught cold and was coughing miserably. When trying to buy medicine for Eleanor, Geoffrey had to resort to coughing as a means of explaining what he wanted as he did not speak Danish. The train that they were going to board was due to leave in the evening. Eleanor and Geoffrey got in touch with the principal of Bethel Bible School in Orsa and he made arrangements for people to meet them. The train left Copenhagen for Sweden. When they got to Borlang Station, they found someone waiting for them. A different person took them for dinner. After dinner their host took them back to the railway station, where they met other foreign students and where they boarded the train for the onward journey. Their next port of call was Orsa, the final destination. Here they found people sent by the school to meet them.

### **Experiencing Life in Sweden**

Upon arrival the couple were provided with an upstairs room in a housing complex with breakfast being taken downstairs. It was summer in the northern hemisphere and for Geoffrey the experience was extraordinary. It was the first time he had been overseas. The sun was still above the horizon at 10.00 o'clock and Geoffrey found it hard to fall asleep. Dark curtains helped to create the feeling of night-fall. By 4.00 am the sun was up in the eastern sky. The change of weather impacted negatively on Geoffrey who was used to the warm and pleasant African weather.

Bethel Bible School was established by Ebbe Bolin, a US educated pastor. He had been in Chicago and was fluent in English. Although he was Pentecostal, the Bible School was interdenominational. The fact that Geoffrey had attended Spring

Valley Bible School was an added advantage. He was tested to determine his knowledge and understanding of the Bible. Geoffrey was asked to give English lessons to the class. There were only two black people in the Bible School and equally few at the local university, one being from Ethiopia. The university was one of the places where they used to preach.

Eleanor and Geoffrey received invitations to preach at various churches over the weekends. The churches knew Ebbe and Eleanor and Geoffrey were given clearance to undertake the work. Eleanor was particularly gifted in languages and during her stay in Sweden she quickly picked up some Swedish. When they went out to preach Eleanor interpreted for her husband. The churches that invited them were not part of the Assemblies of God. It was churches such as the Salvation Army, the Wesleyan Methodist Church, the Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Church. It was a pleasure for the two to seize the opportunity to bring to those churches elements of Pentecostalism, especially the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

During their time in Sweden there was some opportunity to visit and explore the country. The deputy headmaster of the Bible School invited them to visit the capital Stockholm. Being a first time visitor Geoffrey was keen to explore as much of the country as possible. The Mkwanzazis joined other tourists by boarding a boat to travel on the canal system around Stockholm and its environs. They had the chance to view the museum, which they enjoyed. Before the Mkwanzazis left home for Sweden they had been invited to visit various congregations so they could bid farewell to members of the church. The boat cruise afforded them the

opportunity to cast their minds back to those pleasant and unforgettable days. Looming large in their minds was the Xhosa song composed by a Xhosa non-Christian. The song, Ntsikane, foretold the arrival of whites who travelled on water to South Africa. "There shall come nations, of people with flowing hair, they bring the Bible, they are holding silver coins without holes. Our people should embrace the Bible because it is the word of Jehovah. Those who do not accept the word will perish. They will be scattered like water." The words of hope and salvation were recorded and the song is popular in various assemblies to this day.

### **Arrival of the First Child**

When Eleanor was expecting their first child her dietary tastes became somewhat difficult. She developed a liking for tripe but this was not a popular dish in Sweden. In fact, tripe was generally thrown out. Efforts to get offal from butchers met with no success. Instead, they were shown sausage casings, which they turned down. On 31 January the baby arrived. Geoffrey had been travelling with Paul Lundin, his interpreter in the northern part of the country. While there, Geoffrey and Paul were telephoned with the message to return as soon as possible as Eleanor was in labour. The roads were impassable, thick with snow, which needed bulldozers to clear. Salt was also used to melt the snow. The bad weather conditions delayed their movements and the baby arrived before they got to the hospital. Geoffrey had wanted his first born to be a boy but it turned out the baby was a girl. "I pretended to be happy, otherwise I was going to be unpopular with the Swedes," Geoffrey related.

It was the usual practice for Eleanor and Geoffrey to hold prayer meetings in the evening. Many joined them and they would pray as a group. Eleanor had been praying for a safe delivery and on one particular day many visitors came to lay their hands on Eleanor's head. They started speaking in foreign tongues and the languages were clearly neither English nor Swedish. Eleanor was at a loss as to what these people were saying in their prayers. One of them could however interpret what was being said in the prayers. Then came the greatest surprise when the lady who was doing the interpretation suddenly began speaking in Zulu, a language she did not know. "*Ungesabi ngizongena nawe. Ngizoba nawe*" Fear not, I will be with you. Eleanor was curious to know more about the lady who spoke in Zulu. "Was that lady ever in South Africa?" "No Eleanor, what do you mean?" asked one of the group. "She prayed in Zulu while praying for me." The news spread throughout the whole town. Eleanor went to the lady to ask her about the experience. "Have you ever been to South Africa? When you prayed for me the first time, I was anxious to understand. The prayer was not targeted at everybody. The prayer was aimed at me. I then prayed for someone to interpret. Then the second time you came you spoke in Zulu, the language I know and used at school." The lady explained that she had been reluctant to pray, arguing, "How do I pray for you when I don't understand English. When I prayed I thought someone would come and interpret. Then when I prayed this utterance came and you tell me it was Zulu." God is good Baba.

The day before Eleanor had the baby she dreamt of a pregnant black woman with a red thread around her womb. A white hand removed the red thread. Then came a voice, "Did you see that?"

“Yes” she responded. “The red you saw meant death.” “Did you see that white hand that removed the thread?”

“Yes.”

“It is life.”

A month after the dream Eleanor was taken to hospital to have the baby. There were two doctors and one nurse who attended to her. They began to speak in hushed anxious tones amongst themselves, assuming that Eleanor did not understand Swedish. The reason for their apprehension was that the baby’s umbilical cord went around her neck with the possibility of asphyxia and death. “Let’s leave everything as it is. They are a young couple, they will have another baby,” said one of the doctors. Just as Eleanor was wheeled to theatre, she remembered her dream of red and white. The doctors had decided to operate on her and when she came to she asked about the baby. “Is my baby alive?” While all this was happening Geoffrey and Paul were struggling through snowy conditions to be with Eleanor when she delivered the baby. In Sweden men were allowed to be with their wives when they delivered, Geoffrey did not return in time for the birth but it was taboo in African culture to witness one’s wife in labour anyway. The caesarian operation had been painful but Eleanor was well looked after in the hospital. By the time she was discharged from hospital Eleanor was fit once again. Mother and baby returned to the Bible School accommodation. Eleanor attended lessons when she was not looking after the baby. Margaret Hahne assisted with the laundry.

Naming among Africans is an important and practical consideration. Sometimes a child is named after the circumstances of the parents at the time of birth. Sometimes the parents address

the people around them through the name that they give to the child. In this instance the baby was born at the time of heavy snow. The baby was thus appropriately named Ithiel Karin Noliqwa, literally the mother of snow in the SiNdebele language. She was born on 31 st January 1964 in Orsa. To the family she was affectionately known as Lili. “The baby cried a lot and at times I left her to cry – it was good for her lungs. I learnt to be a nanny and how to change nappies.” Many students took turns to feed her, which was a help to Eleanor as she felt tired. The Ethiopian student was overjoyed, “I can’t remember when I last saw a black baby.”

When the child was four months old Geoffrey heard a call from the Lord. The message came loud and clear. “Go back to Southern Rhodesia!” Geoffrey resisted the call. “No Baba, that can’t work. We have to raise money for the return ticket. We have a two year agreement.” Geoffrey experienced a difficult period in his life. He prayed and fasted. He even began losing weight. The principal noticed the change in him. He approached Eleanor and said to her, “Please prepare him some traditional food, perhaps our food does not go down well with him.” Geoffrey had a vision where Reverend Bhengu quizzed him, “Mkwanazi, are you sure the Lord said you should go?” When Geoffrey left South Africa for Sweden he had not told the Reverend Bhengu that he had borrowed money for the airfares as it seemed shameful at the time.

The two celebrated the arrival of Ithiel Noliqwa Karin. When grown up, Noliqwa took after her father in terms of height. She was quite tall, lean with chocolate-toned skin. She was stunningly beautiful in the conventional and African sense-with high cheek bones and pronounced facial features. She was extremely lively,

vivacious by nature and had an infectious laughter. Her childhood life was dramatic; one particular one was when she kicked an older boy who had threatened her younger brother when both were attending Masuku Primary School in Tshabalala. Her fear was related several times during family functions. She was by all accounts the apple of her father's eye and her death at thirty seven years broke his heart. For many years to come he did not talk about her. At the mention of her name, he would sob. No wonder during interviews the story of his children was omitted. It was Nobizo who had to make a submission on the children long after the story had been written. Noliqwa married Joram Ndiweni Chief Khayisa's oldest son. The couple had three children: Marshall Mhlambezi, Lingwe Cecil and Mimi Michelle.

Reverend Geoffrey knew that he had had a son by another woman long before his marriage to Eleanor. The son was Abednico Nhlanhla Mbongwa whose mother was Evelyn Mbongwa. Where the mother of the child is not married, the child takes the family name of the maternal uncles. In this case, Abednico assumed the family name of his mother, Mbongwa. Abednico was born in Johannesburg in 1955. He was also known as Kruschev, which was the name of the Soviet Prime Minister at the time. A tall and handsome son, Abednico had a conspicuous birth mark on his face. In the 1960s he was brought to the Mkwanazi family by his mother who, together with her family, brought up the baby. Reverend Mkwanazi sometimes wondered whether his son was still alive. "I just hope he is well," Reverend Mkwanazi would say with remorse

### **Pressured to Go Back to Africa**

Eleanor was puzzled by her husband's sudden decision to return to Southern Rhodesia. While in South Africa, Geoffrey had become a South African citizen. Being newly married Eleanor did not fully understand him yet. She was aware that they had little money and would find it difficult to raise the money to return. At the Swedish Alliance, they used to get a little more than at the Assemblies of God. Eleanor contemplated, "Perhaps I was not kind to the man. I needed to think. So I decided to fast and pray. I began to lose weight." Then there was a storm, similar to one experienced in Swaziland. It was then that Eleanor realized she was the stumbling block in not being keen to go to Southern Rhodesia. It was then that she changed her mind and was ready to go. The dream that she had changed her stance. They decided to go and see the principal the following morning.

The next morning came. Geoffrey approached the principal and advised him accordingly. "The Lord says we should go back." The incredulous principal laughed. "How do you go back, on foot? We are agreed you were going to stay here for two years. Then we would ask for money from the churches you are visiting. However, if the Lord says you should go back, then the good Lord will provide the money." The principal accepted their request on the proviso they would take care of their airfares. "Remember you came to this country through my efforts. The police could be after you," said the principal.

The couple decided to move out of the Bible School premises. In Orsa there was a Pentecostal Church of Philadelphia. The Mkwanzazis had become acquainted with the young pastor in



charge of the church. The pastor lived on the church premises. Sometimes the Mkwanzazis left their baby Noliqhwa with the pastor and his wife when they went to preach at neighbouring churches. The young priest came to Geoffrey and Eleanor's aid and accommodated them in a flat. These were hard times financially and Eleanor and Geoffrey decided to sell cards of photographs of Noliqhwa and themselves. Wherever they went they took the cards with them to sell to the various congregations.

It was time to pray for the Lord's intervention and they prayed from deep within their hearts. "Lord, it appears we are liars. It was you, our Lord, who said we should go back before the end of our term here. We are in a foreign land. Please dear Lord, come to our rescue." The desperate two even toyed with the idea of writing home to Reverend Bhengu requesting financial assistance. In the end they saw no point in writing to Reverend Bhengu to tell him they were stranded, as he had been against the idea of their coming to Sweden in the first place. Sometimes they even thought they were beginning to behave like babies as they were so desperate to get money to return. They felt the urge, nay the drive to go back to Southern Rhodesia. They remembered the Biblical Elijah and hoped they too would receive gifts in the same manner – perhaps the birds would bring them the air tickets they needed.

One day they thought they heard the voice of God speak to them saying that the tickets had been sent to them. Geoffrey was in a frenzy and rushed to the mail-box hoping to find the tickets. Eleanor had rushed to the balcony where she looked at the sky in the hope that birds would deliver the tickets. This was faith of a rare kind. The Mkwanzazis were psyched up to go back. They even

went into town armed with the little money they had from a church collection in order for Eleanor to buy a pressure cooker and some cups. Again this was an act of faith. Buying items to take with them back to Africa when they had no air tickets was another act of faith. They were convinced that their prayers would be responded to.

It was Minister Ekh, the young Pentecostal pastor who accommodated them, who came up with a suggestion. He offered to contact a colleague in Stockholm. “Even if they give you Kroner each, that should be sufficient to buy the tickets for the three of you.” The Mkwanazis were too proud to take up the offer. They did not want to be seen to be beggars. “I was trying to help out but you have spurned my hand,” said the pastor, who was beginning to doubt the faith of the two Africans.

An opportunity presented itself when they went to Jörn in the northern part of Sweden. There was a youth camp meeting of the Swedish Alliance Church. They knew Eleanor from her earlier visit in 1960 before she got married to Geoffrey. They had not met Geoffrey before. The couple and Noliqwa were housed in the home of a young couple. Many of Eleanor’s old friends came to meet her and congratulate her on her marriage. They knew she had married a member of a Pentecostal church and so they were keen to meet their son-in-law. On the last Sunday some parents of children from the locality came to pick up the Mkwanazis. On this particular Sunday Geoffrey was preaching. He and his family were to stay with the Bohman family. Bernt Bohman and his wife were the couple for whom Eleanor served as interpreter. Geoffrey was a charismatic preacher, “Hold on to Jesus come what may!” he

boomed. While Geoffrey was preaching an old lady started crying. She thought she was blessed to see a black man preach so well. The old lady approached the couple who were hosting the Mkwanzazis to invite Geoffrey and Eleanor to dinner the next day. During their visit the old lady confided, “When Geoffrey spoke that day, I heard the Lord say to me I should give you money for the tickets. I have been saving this money over a long period of time. I had intended to give it to someone from India but the Lord said No.” It was then that the Mkwanzazis appreciated that their turning down the offer to go to Stockholm was God’s plan. “How much money would it cost to fly you to Johannesburg?” asked the old lady. The Mkwanzazis knew it would cost a fortune but were reluctant to divulge the figure because of the high cost. The host pressed them for an answer. All that they could say was, “We shall find out from the travel agent.” The Mkwanzazis were given a lot of money by the lady but, while thanking her warmly, they knew it would not cover the cost of the flights.

It was time to pray once again. “This time we heard the Lord promise that he would give us the money but in instalments,” recalled Eleanor. It was time to go back to the Youth Camp. One cold morning there was a knock on the front door and, as it is a Swedish custom to serve coffee very early in the morning, they assumed the knock was from someone coming to serve them hot coffee. But they did observe that that particular day the knock was made much earlier than usual. Eleanor got up to attend to the person knocking on the door. She had the advantage of fluency in Swedish. At the door was the old lady who was crying, “Why didn’t you tell me the money that I gave you was not enough?” she quizzed the Mkwanzazis. “A beggar does not look a gift horse in the

mouth. You cannot say a gift is not enough. A gift is a gift, it is always complete in the spirit in which it is given,” responded Geoffrey humbly. The emotionally moved old lady gave them more money, enough to pay for flights to South Africa.

Their hosts, the Bohmans, took Eleanor and Geoffrey shopping, where they bought them clothing. Eleanor phoned Pastor Ekh in Orsa to tell him the good news, “God has availed the ticket,” she shouted. The trip back home was secured. The threesome flew back to Jan Smuts International Airport, arriving on 14 December 1964. There were a lot of people waiting to meet the Mkwanazis, including Reverend Nicholas Bhengu and Eleanor’s paternal grandfather. Her grandmother had died while they were in Sweden. Ministers from the Assemblies of God and members from Alexandra came to welcome their evangelist. Noliqhwa was crawling by then and could utter a few words, “*Thitha, thitha*. Mama look, they look like us,” she said, looking at the black faces that she had been starved of back in Sweden.



Eleanor 'Nops' Nobizo on the day of Noliqhwa's wedding



Nops and husband, Rob Von Bennecke



Safari Von Bennecke



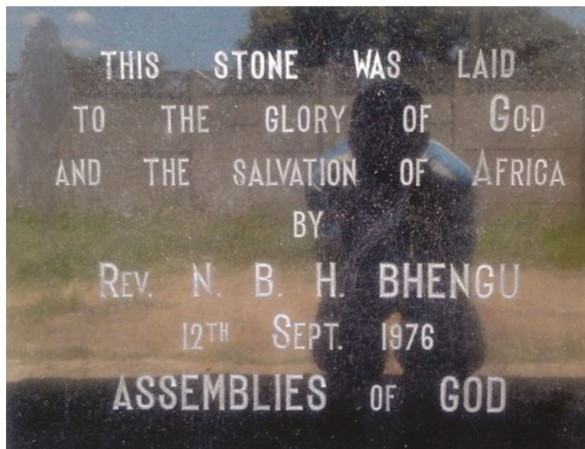
Liqhwa, Nops and mother.



Nops and Pastor Dan Moyo



Highfield Assembly Building, the oldest in Zimbabwe.







Mbare Assembly Building.

THIS STONE WAS LAID TO  
THE GLORY OF GOD AND  
SALVATION OF AFRICANS  
BY  
REV. N. B. H. BHENGU  
20TH OCTOBER 1984  
ASSEMBLIES OF GOD



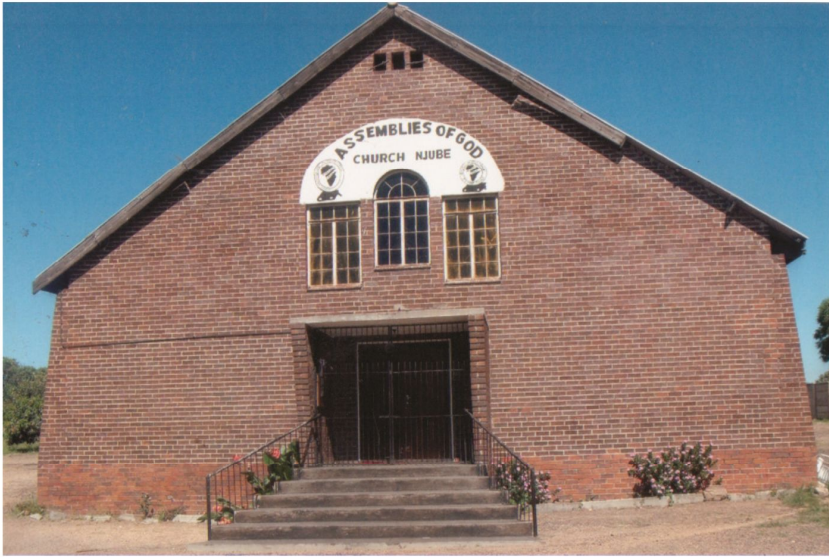
Seke National, Chitungwiza Assembly.



Dr Cuthbert Chidoori



Mathamsanqa Dube



Njube Assembly building, the oldest in Bulawayo

CITY OF BULAWAYO

Your Ref. ....  
Our Ref. ...WHM/GKF.....

Town Clerk's Office,  
P.O.Box 591,  
BULAWAYO,  
31st October 1973.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I have received your letter of the 25th October, 1973  
regarding "Back to God Crusade" : Assemblies of God  
Evangelist : Rev. Nicholas Bhengu.

This is receiving attention and I will write to you again as soon as possible.

Yours faithfully,  
E.G. BRIGHT  
Town Clerk.

MEETING 2.15 p.m.  
THURSDAY 8/11/73.  
UPSTAIRS ROOM 121 MR JORDAN  
BEHIND KHATHI ROAD CLINIC.  
HOUSING & AMENITIES,  
Phone 70111.

## *Chapter 8*

# **Serving with Reverend Nicholas Bhengu**

God's command had been obeyed. The Mkwanazis were back on African soil but not yet Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia having recently become Rhodesia. Eleanor had wanted to go to Rhodesia ever since she had learnt of missionaries like Dr David Livingstone. But Geoffrey was no longer that keen to go to Rhodesia. When Eleanor reminded him about the calling to go to Rhodesia, his terse response was, "*Uzohamba wedwa.*" You will go alone. The Lord had his plans and sometimes these are fraught with misfortunes.

### **Attending Christmas Convention in East London**

On their arrival they attended a welcome reception at Pimville, organized by the assembly that had nurtured Geoffrey. Soon after, they set off to attend a Christmas Convention in East London. Ithiel Noliqhwa was left in the care of her maternal grandmother. They felt privileged and blessed to share transport with the charismatic Reverend Bhengu who had just bought a new car. Reverend Bhengu and his guests used the route that passed through Pietermaritzburg where the Reverend Bhengu had a house. The people at his house knew he was coming and prepared *amasi*, curdled milk, his favourite dish, for him. Eleanor had other plans and she offered him rice and beef stew. In the morning the

hosts reported to Reverend Bhengu that they had prepared *amasi* for him but *umakoti*, the new wife, had other plans. The story that Eleanor had denied Reverend Bhengu a dish of *amasi* did the rounds in the city.

This was the time of Bantu homelands when the South African government created areas that it set aside for particular African tribes. There were homelands for the Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Shangani, Venda etc. Reverend Bhengu and his party spent the second night at the homestead of the Xhosa Paramount Chief, Kaiser Mathanzima. Reverend Bhengu shared a bedroom with Reverend Geoffrey Mkwanazi.

Early in the morning Geoffrey went to knock on Eleanor's bedroom door in order to fetch his bath towel. Word was sent to Reverend Bhengu that his driver was visiting his maid in her bedroom. Reverend Bhengu had to explain that the two were married, were not in his employ and had just come back from Sweden. "We are very sorry sir, we thought he was your driver and she was your maid." The following day they proceeded to East London. Reverend Bhengu wanted to book them into a hotel but in the end, Eleanor and Geoffrey were put up at Mvandaba, where the deacons were staying. After the service Eleanor and Geoffrey took a stroll, hand in hand. Some church members were alarmed and soon the matter reached the ears of Reverend Bhengu. "Who are these that walk holding hands?" they asked. "Keep calm, these two are married," responded Reverend Bhengu. In order to clear the air once and for all, Reverend Bhengu ended up introducing the two to the congregants. The servers wanted to cover the table where Reverend Bhengu was sitting with a nice table cloth. He declined

and extended the offer to Eleanor and Geoffrey. Once again, some people were perturbed. “Who is this man who is given preference over Reverend Bhengu?” “Don’t you know that he has just arrived back from overseas?” said Reverend Bhengu, as a way of explaining the preferential treatment.

Eleanor admired Reverend Bhengu immensely. She had heard about him while at the Spring Valley Bible School between 1957 and 1959. By that time the Reverend was already famous and had established the Back To God Crusade in 1950. His passion and obsession had been to reach the African continent for Christ. The question that vexed Eleanor was what made Reverend Bhengu so famous and popular. “God, show me exactly what it is about this man. What is in him? I do not doubt him, but I just want to know more about him,” prayed Eleanor. There were conventions at Witbank that Eleanor attended where she prayed hard that she not be overtaken by the flood. There were speakers from overseas, dynamic black and white preachers. There were three services a day and altar calls were made. Fridays and Saturdays were days for the other preachers. Reverend Bhengu came on stage on Sundays. “Lord have mercy on me. I need your mercy. God have mercy on me... I want to speak about the presence of the Lord. Where two or three people are gathered, the Lord is there. I want to say the word of the Lord that will touch everybody. When God is in the house no one will be idle. God’s presence touches everybody.”

The money that Eleanor and Geoffrey were given in Sweden was more than enough for the airfares. They brought the extra money with them to South Africa, which they used to purchase their first car, a two door *Audi DKW*, which was light on petrol. Reverend

Bhengu was a fatherly figure who freely gave advice to the young couple, “You must never buy a big car. The members of the congregation will expect you to give them a ride.” One notable miracle took place when Reverend Bhengu was preaching. A young girl who was born disabled (*isifombo*) came forward to be healed by Reverend Bhengu. She was short, with a stooping gait. Reverend Bhengu placed his hands on the girl’s head. Bones were heard creaking as they straightened. She was able to walk properly, though her shortness remained.

Geoffrey was not licensed to drive so a pastor from Cape Town, Reverend Seko, drove the family all the way to Alexandra. Church members assisted Geoffrey with driving lessons, in particular a gentleman from Germiston who coached Geoffrey until he obtained his licence.

At the Christmas Convention there was a tent for blacks, and two more for whites and coloureds and Indians. In this respect the Church had adopted the colour bar practiced by the National Party that came to power in 1948. All who listened to Reverend Bhengu were mesmerized, some ran to him, and others got onto the stage. Orderly queueing did not work and there was a stampede to hear him. The barrier of apartheid was for that short period breached. Everybody wanted to be touched by the hand of this Zulu man, who, they were convinced, was the chosen one of God. He surely was the anointed one. It was this rare gift in the man that soon earned him the accolade, the black Billy Graham. “You see these whites, why not say Billy Graham is a white Bhengu?” asked Bhengu, puzzled by the racist bias of the white Christian world.



### **Visiting Parents in Zimbabwe**

Geoffrey decided to take his wife and daughter Ithiel Noliqwa to visit his parents in Rhodesia. At the time Eleanor was expecting their second child. Among the Ndebele there is a practice called *ukucola* where a beast is killed for the new bride as a sign of approval and acceptance. Before the advent of Christianity, the ritual was also a way of informing the ancestors about the new addition into the family. The same ritual was performed for a newly arrived baby. In both instances bile was sprinkled on the body joints of the bride or baby. Customs have since changed. The worldview of Africans is slowly but surely changing. This is particularly so in urban areas where the ways of yesteryears are fast disappearing. Where a new worldview has taken root, the old cultural practices have been eroded. In the olden days a cow or ox would have been slaughtered as part of the ritual to welcome a new bride. In urban areas cattle are not part of the landscape. Beef that is obtainable from the butcheries is not suitable for ritual purposes. The beast must come from a man's cattle byre. Goats have however found their way into the urban areas and they have replaced cattle during the performance of certain rituals. Successful businessmen with lorries venture out into the rural areas, particularly Gwanda, Beitbridge and Matobo, to buy goats. Once in town the goats are allowed to roam and graze in open spaces in the Western Commonage and are penned overnight near Tshabalala, the suburb where Geoffrey and Eleanor would live once back in Rhodesia. As a result of these changes that have been wrought in urban African societies, a goat and not a cow, was killed for Eleanor and the new baby. Annett, who was teaching at a rural school, brought the goat. Eleanor loved goat casings *amathumbu*, in particular the mildly bitter taste. Eleanor advised Geoffrey's

sister Sybil not to clean the casings thoroughly so as not to lose the bitterness. Sybil was known to Eleanor as she had met them at the border. When quizzed why the casings were poorly cleaned the embarrassed Sybil simply said, “It is Sister Eleanor who said I should leave them in that state.”

The house of the senior Mkwanazi was on Mashona Road facing an open space, which had been turned into a garden. Several small plots had been allocated to the elderly members of the Luveve community and Geoffrey’s father was one of those who owned a few vegetable beds in the garden. Eleanor’s favourite dish was never *isitshwala*, the thick porridge that the Ndebele consider their staple. In Sweden she prepared meals with potatoes in the main. She prepared rice for Mkwanazi Senior, which he enjoyed. One day she prepared *isitshwala* and offered it to Geoffrey’s father when he came home for lunch. “This meal is nice. But it would have been nicer with *amasi*, curdled milk,” her father-in-law said. Eleanor took this as a compliment and it was only later that her husband confided that her father-in-law was being diplomatic and that he did not enjoy the meal.

The second baby, Oswald Mandlenkosi, was delivered at Mpilo Central Hospital, a fairly new health facility built in 1957 during the time of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Rhodesia was obsessed with race like South Africa. Prior to the construction of Mpilo Hospital the Memorial Hospital had provided health facilities for both whites and blacks, albeit in different sections of the racially segregated hospital. When the new hospital was built it catered for black people only. Another hospital for whites, the United Bulawayo Hospital (UBH) was built. The Rhodesian Prime

Minister at the time was the liberal New Zealand missionary Garfield Todd of the Church of Christ. There was a lot of infrastructural development that took place during his incumbency, especially in the education sector.

Oswald Mandlenkosi was born in 1965. Known as Ollie by his family, Oswald was named after a famous Evangelist with the same name. His parents had named him even before the first child, Noliqhwa was born. It was to be the name of their first son. He was gentle and quiet by nature. He was diagnosed with schizophrenia in his late teens, a condition he lived with throughout his years and the whole family adapted to and accepted. He was a keen academic and showed early promise of excellence in mathematics and sciences-an interest that was nurtured by an elder brother in Christ Lucky Moyo. His interest in dogs, nature and history made his seemingly lonely life adaptable. He was the apple in his mother's eye and in turn adored her, while in obvious reverence of his father. He never married but had a daughter named Gugulami with Busi Tshabalala.

One of Geoffrey's sisters, Ruth, who was married to a Mhlanga man, was a nursing sister at Mpilo Hospital. She rented a flat in Nguboyenja Township, one of Bulawayo's older townships. The township was named after a son of King Lobengula, one of the three that were whisked out of Matabeleland by Cecil John Rhodes, ostensibly to give them a western education, when in actual fact his intention was to remove a rallying point for the possible restoration of the erstwhile Ndebele State that Rhodes had destroyed. Eleanor and Geoffrey went to live in Ruth's flat in Nguboyenja. Eleanor's father-in-law used to bring her vegetables.

His visits were quite frequent and one day Geoffrey said to his wife, “Honey, you know what, I am happy this is my father. If he were not, I would be worried what he was doing with my wife.” Nguboyenja was between Luveve and the city centre where the vegetable market was located. “Each time I go to town, I find him here.” Geoffrey’s father loved his daughter-in-law and when he got to the flat he would say, “I thought I should pass by to say hello to my son’s wife.”

### **Visiting Christopher at Khami Prison**

The political situation in Rhodesia had gone from bad to worse. While the winds of change were blowing across the African continent and several former colonies attained independence, it was not so in Rhodesia. The Dominion Party led by Winston Field won the elections. As white opinion became more radicalized, the Dominion Party became the Rhodesia Front and Ian Douglas Smith took over as leader of the racist white party. By 1964 Smith was the Rhodesian Prime Minister. He soon initiated the promulgation of repressive pieces of legislation such as the Law and Order (Maintenance) Act. The black nationalist parties, namely the People’s Caretaker Council (PCC), a successor to the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU), which had been banned in 1962 and the breakaway Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) were proscribed. Smith was preparing to arrest and detain nationalist leaders. He did so in 1964 and the ZAPU leaders were sent to Gonakudzingwa, where they languished for varying periods of time. The ZANU leaders were sent to Sikombela, again for long periods of incarceration. All this repressive legislation and

administrative measures were to pave the way for the Unilateral Declaration of (white) Independence (UDI) on 11 November 1965.

Among those in incarceration in Rhodesia was Christopher, Geoffrey's younger brother. He was at Khami Prison, a facility just outside Bulawayo, which was built in response to the increasing clamp down on African nationalists. In 1965 there were trained guerillas who had been infiltrated into Rhodesia from Zambia. Some of them were arrested and sent to Khami's maximum security section. More nationalists and captured guerillas were still to be held at Khami after 1965, the year Eleanor and Geoffrey visited Christopher. Eleanor was excited at the prospect of meeting Christopher, although naturally upset that he was in prison. They had exchanged letters before the visit to the prison. When they got to Khami Prison, Eleanor and Geoffrey were advised that they should have indicated they were coming and also indicated how many were in their group. Be that as it may, they were shown a bench on which to sit and await their turn. Names of prisoners were called out by the prison guards and eventually Christopher's name was heard. He came forward laughing. They were allowed to speak to him through a small opening. Unfortunately, Christopher could not see the new car that his brother and sister-in-law were driving. All they could see were each other's faces and no more. A guard was close by listening to their conversation.

### **Status of Assemblies of God in Bulawayo**

During this initial visit to Rhodesia, Geoffrey found very little evidence of the Assemblies of God. All there was, at the time, was the Assemblies of God being run by the Canadians. They were operating from Gampu Government Primary School in Mpopoma

Township, one of the Bulawayo townships built following the end of World War II in 1945. Bulawayo had experienced heightened industrialization and consequently there had been a great demand for labour. The increased labour force needed accommodation. All along there had been townships in what was called the Bulawayo African Townships (BAT) comprising the Location (Makokoba), Mzilikazi, Barbourfields and Nguboyenja. The new housing development took place within the Western Commonage, Mpopoma, Njube, Mabutweni and Iminyela were built. Unfortunately, Pastor Mthombeni, who was in charge of the Assemblies of God, was not terribly helpful and, although Geoffrey encouraged people to go and attend service at Gampu, the pastor was not particularly welcoming. Church growth took place in the early 1970s, following Geoffrey's return to Zimbabwe in 1968.

### **Reverend Bhengu establishes Assemblies of God in Southern Rhodesia**

Progress on the development of the Assemblies of God in Bulawayo would take off when Geoffrey came to Rhodesia following his deportation from South Africa. This happened after he visited Bulawayo for the funeral of his father in 1968. However, pioneering work of the Assemblies of God had been initiated in Salisbury's African township of Highfield in 1959. Prior to 1959 there had been few black assemblies in Southern Rhodesia. The Canadian Assemblies of God had one or two families in the country. There was a Brother Bush of the Canadian Assemblies who ran a Bible School, operating in the name of the Assemblies of God. A decision by the South African Assemblies of God gave impetus to the growth of church work in Southern Rhodesia. The General Executive decided that Reverend Bhengu be sent to

Southern Rhodesia to spearhead a Gospel thrust into the territory to establish work there. Accordingly, John Bond was transferred by James Mullan from Durban to Salisbury, where he was attached to the McChlery Avenue assembly. In order to facilitate the work that Reverend Bhengu was to undertake, Mullan fund-raised within the assemblies associated with his work. A sum of five hundred pounds was raised. Organisational work was left in the hands of John Bond. A site where to pitch the tent had to be obtained. The tents, lorries and sound equipment had to get customs clearance. Equally important was to get a site where the church building would be erected. Advertising posters had to be produced. There were serious challenges in getting the necessary clearances for the equipment that Reverend Bhengu was going to bring into the country. Receiving no joy from the authorities, Bond decided to approach Edgar Whitehead, the Minister of Native Affairs who was also Prime Minister. A few weeks down the line a letter of approval landed in Bond's hands. In Salisbury there was an Assembly of God missionary who had been given land to establish a church in Highfield. Apparently, the missionary had got the news Reverend Bhengu was coming to launch a crusade in Salisbury, specifically in Highfield. The missionary knew Reverend Bhengu to have been a member of the Communist Party and he was not prepared to work with a communist. He thus resigned from the Assemblies of God and joined the Full Gospel Church. The white church, according to Bond (1994), made monetary contributions towards the erection of the steel frame for the church. Reverend Bhengu's crusade was successful. Thousands turned up at the crusade and many were saved. In order to consolidate his work, Reverend Bhengu left behind some of his aides to shepherd the work. Initially, the key man he left to take charge was Brother Xaba, a man once arraigned

before the courts for fatally stabbing a man. Later in life Brother Xaba converted to Christianity during a tent crusade in the Eastern Cape. Unfortunately, Brother Xaba was not used to the African veldt with its insect life and he was even afraid of mosquitoes. He was transferred to Livingstone in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia). His fear did not subside and he was finally sent back to South Africa. Reverend Bhengu however continued to come to Rhodesia to organize meetings and seminars.

Highfield was the counterpart of Luveve in Bulawayo. It was an African village built a long distance from Salisbury. Harare, the first black township in Salisbury, was a short distance from the centre of the white city. Highfield provided housing for black government employees. Married couples were allowed to rent accommodation. By 1959 there was strong political activity in the area. On 12 September 1959, at the Mai Musodzi Hall in Harare Township, a nationwide black nationalist movement was set up. The choice of date was deliberate as the British Union Jack had been hoisted by the so-called Pioneer Column, an adventurous colonizing military outfit of the British South Africa Chartered Company of Cecil John Rhodes, on that date in 1890. Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo, who had been leader of the old African National Congress (ANC) from 1952, became the president of the Southern Rhodesia African National Congress (SRANC). When Reverend Bhengu arrived on the scene the SRANC had just been proscribed and its leaders incarcerated in several prisons such as Khami outside Bulawayo and Marandellas (now Marondera). The authorities were suspicious regarding the timing of Reverend Bhengu's visit. The newspapers were awash with headlines about Reverend Nicholas Bhengu's impending visit. Ahead of his visit,



sent Mayaba Choristers, a Durban choir led by Snowy. Seko came with the choir. They were the advance party that would pitch the tents in the Highfield township. The white assembly in Salisbury arranged Reverend Bhengu's spiritual revival crusade.

On the day he was expected to land at the Salisbury International Airport journalists flocked to see Reverend Bhengu, especially to quiz him on what he was coming to sell to the people. The white journalists were wary of the political consciousness of the blacks at the time. Ghana had attained her independence and several other African colonies were on the verge of attaining freedom – *uhuru*. “Politics is a dirty game. Today it's Tom. Tomorrow it's Jim. But I preach Christ the Rock of Ages who never changes. He is the same, tomorrow and forever,” responded Reverend Bhengu. Several black clergy came to pray for him. Amongst them were Reverends Ndabaningi Sithole, Abel T Muzorewa and Mr Mwamuka. Many sought salvation during Reverend Bhengu's visit. An assembly was established in Highfield. Among the notable developments at the time was Ezekiel Guti and his congregation from the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) coming to join the Reverend Bhengu-formed assembly. Sizeable donations were made during Reverend Bhengu's visit. With the money he built the structures for the church at Highfield. The metal frame and floors were done. An asbestos roof was placed on the metal frame. It was left to the church congregation to complete the structure by erecting the walls. In order to consolidate the work that had been achieved, Reverend Bhengu left Brother Seko and Brother Xaba was later sent to help with the work. The latter was newly-wed and found the demands of the pioneering work rather challenging. Seko found the sadza-choumolier (a leaf vegetable) diet unappetizing and too routine. He

too failed and returned to South Africa. In their place Reverend Bhengu sent Reverend Albert Gumede from Witbank. He managed to secure a house in the township with title deeds. Reverend Albert Gumede's health was not good and he was fussy when it came to food. The Shona people, among whom he worked, felt that Reverend Gumede considered himself superior. He too failed and left for Umtali (now Mutare) where he opened a Bible School in one of the townships.

### **Ezekiel Guti Breaks Away**

No sooner had the Highfield assembly started than it experienced problems. Ezekiel Guti and his followers left the assembly in 1960. There were altercations when he attempted to take the name of the church with him. He called his new religious group the Assemblies of God Africa. This is the organization that would later grow by leaps and bounds – going under the name of Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA) and becoming the biggest Pentecostal movement in Zimbabwe with branches in the diaspora. The white pastors within the Assemblies of God would not accept Ezekiel Guti running away with the name of their organization. “You joined us. You cannot take that name. If you are leaving, leave our name behind. We use that name in South Africa,” they argued. Of course Ezekiel did not listen to them. The idea of importing Zulu pastors from South Africa did not augur well for sustained work in Highfield. The people in Highfield wanted one of their own to minister to them. “*Tinoda wedu asingaturikirwi.*” We want one of our own who will not require someone to translate for him. There were cultural barriers between the worshippers and the pastors coming from South Africa. The situation got even worse when there were inter-party clashes between supporters of ZAPU and

those of ZANU. The split within the nationalist movement in 1963 took on ethnic dimensions. The Ndebele speaking people remained loyal to Nkomo's ZAPU while the breakaway party ZANU of Sithole drew its support predominantly from the Shona. That Ndebele and Zulu cultures are closely related stoked the fires of mistrust within the church in Highfield. Geoffrey was to experience ethnic animosity when he served a short stint in Highfield

Reverend Bhengu's stance towards Gutu was that he should be left alone. "There are many people and we should not quarrel over them," said Reverend Bhengu. Some white pastors were however adamant that the man should not be left alone. They alleged Gutu had become a little God who was worshipped by his followers. They could not accept that. The Reverend Bhengu and the Reverend Gutu enjoyed a good relationship by the time the former died in 1985. It was Reverend Bhengu's wish to send Geoffrey to Salisbury to man the fort there and oversee the work that he had initiated. At the time Geoffrey was not keen to go Rhodesia. Only when he was deported from South Africa did he finally return home. He set up base in Bulawayo and only later did he go to Highfield in Salisbury. The church was going through a bad patch at the time. The situation deteriorated to such an extent that Reverend Bhengu gave up on Zimbabwe. The situation was to get worse when he died. But that was after a great deal of work that Reverend Mkwanazi did in Zimbabwe. Initially, Reverend Mkwanazi did work in Bulawayo and the environs before venturing to far flung places such as Mutare and Harare. The work that Reverend Bhengu had initiated grew from strength to strength.

## **Profile of Reverend Bhengu**

But who was this Reverend Bhengu, the man Bond described as far seeing with a vision of the future? Who was this man who planted the seed that germinated and grew by leaps and bounds? Nicholas Bhengu was born on 5 September 1909 at Entumeni. His father was a pastor of the American Lutheran Mission. He did primary education at the mission school before proceeding to two Roman Catholic schools, namely Inkumama and Mariahill. After school he was employed as a clerk, a teacher, a health inspector and a court interpreter. Industrial conditions in South Africa led to the unionization of black workers who sought to improve their working conditions. As a result the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union was born which campaigned for black advancement. The young Bhengu worked in the ICU offices in Durban. Through trade union activity, Bhengu became politically conscious and when he went to work in Kimberley as a court interpreter he joined the South African Communist Party

Bhengu always sought spiritual satisfaction and while working in Kimberly he dabbled in the spiritual activities of several denominations. This was the time when there was a revival organized by the Full Gospel Church. The first time he went to the revival he was accompanied by his girlfriend. He shied away from seeking salvation on that night. The next time he went alone and, at the age of twenty-one, he sought salvation. After his conversion he returned to KwaZulu-Natal where from 1931 he worked under the auspices of the Full Gospel Church. In order to enhance his knowledge of the Bible, he entered the South African General Mission Bible School at Dumisa, which is today's Union Bible Institute at Sweetwaters. There he befriended Albert Gumede and

Gideon Buthelezi. Buthelezi had been a member of the Methodist Church. He and Reverend Bhengu met in 1934 in a Durban restaurant. Buthelezi was at the time no longer attending the meetings of the Methodist Church. He fell out with the Methodists when he received baptism in the Holy Spirit. Instead, he was conducting study groups. When Reverend Bhengu left the Full Gospel Church, he found a temporary home within Buthelezi's study groups. At the time Buthelezi was not convinced that they should form their own movement. He felt there were already too many schisms that resulted in the proliferation of churches. However, Reverend Bhengu convinced his colleagues, Buthelezi and Gumede, that after all they were not joining the new movement, they were merely working under its wings for the sake of the authorities.

In 1936 at the age of 27 Bhengu was ordained. The year of his ordination was the year when the Assemblies of God was established in South Africa. It was predominantly black with a small white membership. Bhengu became leader of that denomination within the broader Pentecostal movement.

In 1937 Nicholas Bhengu was working as a court interpreter when he saw an advertisement in the magazine *Ubaqa*, which called for a teacher at Emmanuel Mission near Nelspruit (now Mbombela). The man behind the advertisement was Hubert Phillips. Many people with whom he worked at the Emmanuel Mission later joined the Assemblies of God. His two friends Gumede and Buthelezi teamed up with him there. Their ministry, as Watt (1992) observes, was characterized by a sense of independence of mind, a sense of (black) dignity and self-confidence. As a result the

Assemblies of God was not segregated to the same degree as the other Pentecostal churches. In 1937 Hubert Phillips discussed with Mullan the possibility of Emmanuel Mission joining in fellowship with the Assemblies of God, which happened the following year. Each organization retained its own identity and its own property. That arrangement meant each retained links with its respective overseas board. When Mullan and Reverend Bhengu could not push for the changes they envisaged in church government, the two moved to Tzaneen in the then Transvaal Province. Following the 1938 conference it was agreed that churches form groups that enjoyed a considerable measure of autonomy. They could freely move out of the group if they so wished. Mullan led the white assemblies while Bhengu led the black stream.

By 1940 Reverend Bhengu had become a member of the first multi-racial executive council. The year 1944 was critical in that that was the year when Mullan, his wife Mary and their children left Tzaneen for Port Elizabeth. A caravan, bought from Fred Burke, the Principal at Spring Valley Bible School in Witbank, was to become their home in the early days of their stay in Port Elizabeth. Mullen busied himself starting several assemblies in Port Elizabeth. In 1945 Reverend Bhengu followed his friend to Port Elizabeth, where he cut his teeth with tented crusades. Five years later, he had succeeded in establishing the Back To God Crusade, which had its own constitution and equipment such as lorries, pick-ups, tents and sound equipment. The crusade was a brand that went a long way towards giving Reverend Bhengu international status. The main thrust of the Crusade, with Assembly of God preachers, is to plant new assemblies. Once an assembly is established, the Crusade moves on but continues to assist the assembly until it is able to

stand on its own feet. In later years, Geoffrey participated in the Crusade alongside Reverend Bhengu. Reverend Bhengu's crusades had a deep social impact. Many criminals that sought salvation surrendered stolen items. Police trucks were used to ferry the contraband.

Reverend Bhengu then moved to East London, also within the Eastern Cape. His work grew by leaps and bounds. By 1957 he had erected a colossal church building at Duncan Village called Ginyazonke. That was the year when Mkwanazi and Eleanor entered the Bible College at Witbank. The two would, on their return from Sweden, attend the Christmas conference of 1964 at Ginyazonke. From 1944 Reverend Bhengu worked in the Eastern Cape, mostly in Port Elizabeth and East London. In between his busy evangelizing schedule he secured a place at the Taylor University in Indiana. He travelled extensively to the Americas, Western Europe and the Far East. By 1950 he had opened the Pilgrim Bible School in Port Elizabeth and five years later he was moving full steam ahead with the holding of revival meetings in the Eastern Cape. His lively and riveting crusades became known as the Back To God Crusade, a nomenclature that has become part and parcel of the Assemblies of God.

In October 1950 Nicholas Bhengu launched his first crusade in Duncan Village, East London. The crusades were characterized by a well organized publicity campaign, a modern PA system and adequately trained personnel. The introduction of the PA system was a special innovation by Bhengu and was quite a new experience for the targeted audiences. The services were made lively through animated preaching, use of music and the ecstasy

that prevailed. Thousands began to flock to Bhengu's crusades, attracted in the main by his charismatic preaching, his healing sessions, and a sense of curiosity. Bhengu was undoubtedly on the road to fame. He attracted and converted thousands. As work progressed a clearly defined congregation began to emerge

Once Nicholas Bhengu had consolidated his position as an accomplished evangelist he turned his attention to church expansion. That was the time when Eleanor and Geoffrey were starting out at Spring Valley Bible School. One of Reverend Bhengu's allies, Gumede, was a teacher at the Bible School. In 1959 there were no less than fifty assemblies under Bhengu's belt. While maintaining strict control over the churches that he established, Reverend Bhengu continued to do evangelical work right up to his death in 1985. Bhengu became the leader of the black section of the Assemblies of God, while the white, coloured and Indian sections ran parallel structures, which only came together during Executive Council meetings and conventions. In 1990 the churches that had been under Bhengu's leadership were renamed the Assemblies of God Movement.

Geoffrey got very close to the man who was at the helm of missionary expansion and gained first hand information from the immensely gifted evangelist. Geoffrey was told how Bhengu used to be accompanied by his girlfriend whenever he went to the revivals conducted by the American missionaries of the Full Gospel. When the preacher made an altar call Bhengu stepped forward. Later he went to the pastors and gave himself to the Lord. On one occasion when Bhengu was engrossed in prayer he began to see himself in a huge window-less, door-less building. The people in the church



spoke in Chewa and Shona. While still praying he saw himself lifted out of the building and heard a voice asking him to tell the people to pray in order for them to follow him out of the building which was on fire and the people in it burning. He soon realized that the person who was speaking was Jesus Christ, who called upon him to offer his services to Africa. Reverend Bhengu was invited to Maryland in America on one occasion but turned down the offer. “No, my call is in Africa,” he said. Geoffrey travelled extensively with the Reverend Bhengu and continued to learn from him.

When Reverend Bhengu started Christian work he wore overalls and rode on a motorbike. He distributed literature calling on people to attend services at the CTC hall, which belonged to the city council, in Port Elizabeth. When Reverend Bhengu later went to East London, a Xhosa speaking area of South Africa, he faced challenges relating to ethnic attitudes. The Xhosa are critical of people like the Zulu who are not circumcised. In the early days in Port Elizabeth Reverend Bhengu was not confident. He was not even sure which verse in the Bible to open. He began to lay his hands on the sick and they were healed. The disabled came forward and, when he laid his hands on them, they threw away the crutches and walked freely. His crusade lasted several days. Those were the humble beginnings of the church in Port Elizabeth.

The people in Port Elizabeth tended to be well educated, *imfundimana*. Reverend Bhengu realized that if he was to be effective in his work he had to further his own education. Accordingly, he bade farewell to his wife MaNdlela and his children, and boarded a ship bound for Howard University in

America. His first wife MaMthethwa had died and Reverend Nicholas Bhengu married, MaNdlela. While he was in the USA his wife fell ill and the children were not well looked after. The church elders were not giving them sufficient money for their sustenance. Reverend Bhengu was forced to return home. The elders were not there to meet him upon his return, confirming that all was not well. His sick wife was still alive, but had a stooping gait and later died.

He resumed his work in Port Elizabeth, where he tried, without success, to reach out to the assembly. "Please forgive (me). When I was away my children fell sick. As a result, I had to come back," pleaded Reverend Bhengu. His apologies falling on deaf ears, Reverend Bhengu turned to prayer. "Father, I came back without a university degree. Now I am resigned to be an uneducated pastor." The response from the Lord came. "Do not fear I have given you my degree." Despite that Reverend Bhengu continued to face opposition. The Xhosa would not bathe with him as he was considered an uncircumcised *inkwenkwe*. Forgiveness is a spiritual experience. The untiring Reverend Bhengu continued to ask for forgiveness from the assembly: "*Ndixoleleni botata bami.*"



Geoffrey and Eleanor in the USA



**Geoffrey Mkwanzazi**  
Zimbabwe Director  
Back to God Crusade

*An indigenous Christian ministry in the nation of Zimbabwe, Africa.*

**My USA Address:**  
Geoffrey Mkwanzazi  
P. O. Box 200  
Ivy, Va. 22945

*Please pray for us.*

**Geoffrey Mkwanzazi**  
Back to God Crusade  
P. O. Box 200  
Ivy, Va. 22945

**BUSINESS REPLY MAIL**  
FIRST CLASS PERMIT NO. 880  
POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE  
CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA

NO POSTAGE  
NECESSARY  
IF MAILED  
IN THE  
UNITED STATES

*Please fold at line, detach card and fill out and give or mail to Geoffrey Mkwanzazi.*

Date \_\_\_\_\_ 19 \_\_\_\_

Dear Geoffrey,

I want to pray for you and the ministry of Back to God Crusade in Zimbabwe. Please send me your prayer letters from Zimbabwe.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

By faith, I purpose to sponsor one missionary by sending \$25 per month. Please send me the name and photo of the one I sponsor.

By faith, I purpose to send \$ \_\_\_\_\_ each month for your ministry in Africa. Please use it where most needed or for \_\_\_\_\_

Please send me more information on \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

28-18

# Please Pray for

Geoffrey Mkwanzazi

*God has called me to preach the gospel of Christ to the lost and backslidden people of Zimbabwe. The Lord has used me to build up and establish many local churches through the ministry of Back to God Crusade, an indigenous evangelistic ministry directed by Rev. Nicholas Bhengu. Over a thousand new churches have been established throughout the southern portion of Africa since the Lord began to pour forth His Spirit mightily on BTGC missionaries about 25 years ago. I am responsible for directing the ministry of Back to God Crusade in Zimbabwe, a country that has experienced civil war for fifteen years. Even in the midst of war, the Lord has been establishing new churches in this distressed nation. Please pray for us.*



Taken out by friends in the USA



Graduation Day

*Dedicated Service*  
*The Story of Reverend Geoffrey Bizeni Mkwanazi of the Assemblies of God*



The Hall that Geoffrey's father built in Luveve





Geoffrey's first house in Tshabalala



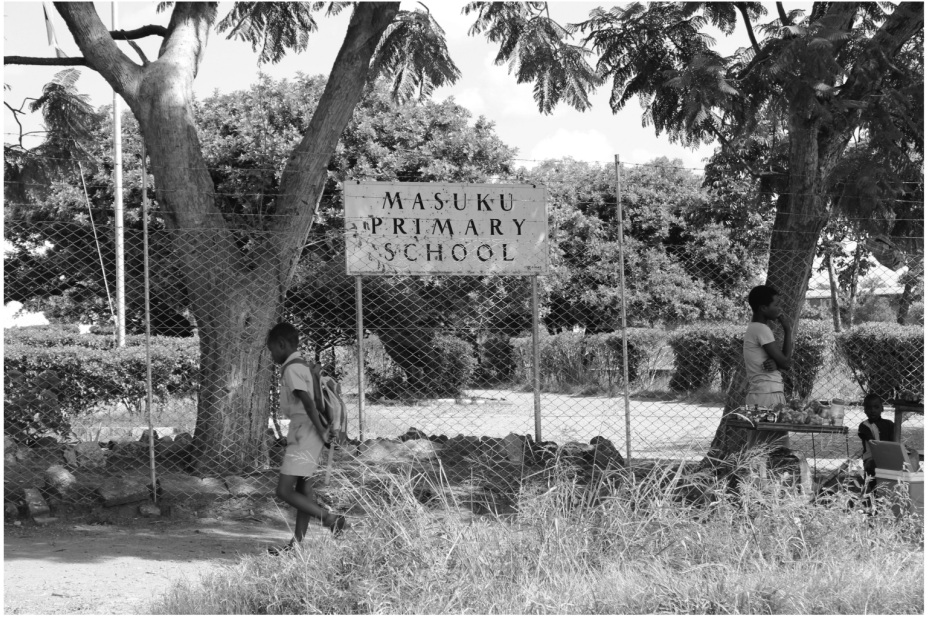
The back of the house is now being used for church services



Geoffrey's flat in Tshabalala







Masuku Primary School



Bhengu's house in Tshabalala



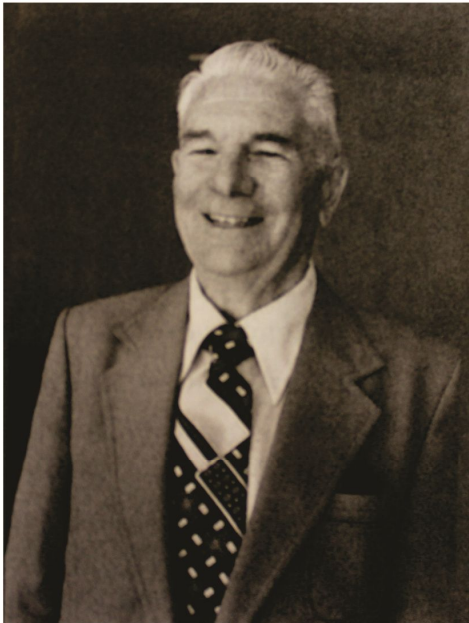
C . A. Chawner  
and H. C. Philips  
*(John Bond 2000)*



Oral Roberts and  
Nicholas Bhengu  
*(John Bond 2000)*



Fred Shabalala  
*(John Bond 2000)*



James E. Mullan  
*(John Bond 2000)*

## Chapter 9

# Back to Bulawayo:

## Revamping Work of the Assemblies of God

### **View of Alexandra Township**

After the return from Zimbabwe, Eleanor and Geoffrey lived apart most of the time. Eleanor stayed at their four-roomed church house in Alexandra with their two children, Noliqhwa and Oswald Mandlenkosi. The house, made of red brick, was rented by the assembly. Many of the people in the area were in the process of building their own houses.

Men, keeping their identities hidden, came late at night to the area to empty their buckets full of night soil. They wore overalls and caps over their heads. They applied dip, a disinfectant, to try to deal with the potentially harmful bacteria. At the time there was no electricity and candles had to be used for lighting. Cooking was done by Eleanor on a primus stove. Later a gas stove was purchased and, when they returned to Zimbabwe, they took the gas stove with them. The stove was later lent to a relative living at Cowdray Park, a sprawling high-density suburb in Bulawayo. The majority of the residents of Alexandra used coal stoves. As the streets were dark at night, Alexandra was called Dark City. The main streets were tarred, but the feeder roads were gravel. The PUTCO buses plied the route from there to the Golden City, Johannesburg.

Geoffrey had founded the Alexandra assembly during the time of the notorious Msoni gang. It was Geoffrey's revival crusades that brought peace to the troubled township. "The Lord made use of Geoffrey in those days," recalled Eleanor. A huge air-conditioned church was built, which has since been greatly improved.

### **Continuing Apprenticeship under Reverend Bhengu**

Geoffrey worked full time with Reverend Bhengu. The house at Alexandra became his base to which he returned after a stint of revival work with the Reverend. A resident pastor had been appointed to take charge of the Alexandra assembly. Geoffrey had, to all intents and purposes, become a peripatetic evangelist and aide to Reverend Bhengu. The arrangement provided Geoffrey with a useful apprenticeship. It was as if he was being prepared for a mission in Zimbabwe. Geoffrey considered his association with the Reverend Bhengu as a favour. When the charismatic Reverend took off, he went with a team that travelled in lorries and vans inscribed, Back To God, which was his revival slogan. At night they stayed in a caravan. Phephi was their maid. The Reverend Bhengu offered some advice to Geoffrey: "Never engage the child of a church member as maid. Rather engage a non-member and have her converted when she is already in your employ. Girls have no respect when you live with them. A stranger will better appreciate the challenges than a member of the church."

Some issues were never revealed to the general church membership. The sources of Reverend Bhengu's income were not known. He bought several cars and houses, which sometimes were not registered in the church's name. This would become an issue

after his death. What was clear at the time was that the administration was not strong. The emphasis was on spiritual work and evangelism. Evangelists were not pinned down to administrative procedures in which even matters of succession were handled. Administrative structures are inherently succession structures as they embrace seniority. Founding leaders tend to be regarded as messianic leaders. Frequently they are seldom questioned on their operations and their excesses can go unchallenged. This is the more pronounced where there is the dimension of spirituality. The spiritual nature of leaders does not lend itself to scrutiny, administrative procedures and institutional culture. Problems often arise when they die. Their successors do not exude the same aura and their weaknesses are not tolerated to the same degree. This happened when the Reverend Bhengu died and the Zimbabwean assemblies were thrown into conflict and strife. The younger church members, some of them products of institutions of higher learning, were trained in bureaucratic procedures. It was a question of negotiating between spiritual zeal and bureaucratic rigidity.

Geoffrey was favoured by Reverend Bhengu. He, as a result, got higher stipends than the other pastors. While the principle should be that, when one is called upon by God, one gets what is available, that was not entirely true in this case. Geoffrey's stipend was supposed to be a closely guarded secret but Tryphine, the secretary at the Assemblies of God, leaked the information that Geoffrey was getting more than his colleagues. Even Eleanor was getting some financial support, though at a lower rate than Geoffrey. When the stipends for the other pastors were raised, Eleanor's was also raised.

Geoffrey was not aware of all the underhand dealings by his mentor.

Reverend Bhengu's tented crusade took them to places such as Soweto (Orlando, Dube and Meadowlands), Stanger, Empangeni and Eshowe. The time of services was generally in the evenings when workers had dismissed from work. Those not working were asked to come back in the morning. If there was a good response at a particular venue, a pastor was appointed to take charge of the new assembly. Tent evangelists were in charge of preaching. Their work was to win souls for the Lord. Pastors remained behind to consolidate the work carried out by evangelists who possessed different skills and were more charismatic and were the ones who made altar calls. The pastors' work was to preach, pray for the sick and explain salvation to the newly converted. It was their responsibility to explain how to walk as a Christian body of Christ.

It is not every pastor who has a gift of healing. Similarly, it is not every pastor who is endowed with the power of casting out demons. When the Holy Spirit comes down some people will speak in tongues. Speaking in tongues should not be confused with demon possession. The former is accompanied with the confession of Jesus Christ, the love and praise of Christ. The demons on the other hand are anti-Christ and when called upon in the name of Jesus, they will say, "I want to go out." The ability to cast out demons and the ability to speak in tongues are closely related. In order to distinguish between the two one has to have the power of discerning. One endowed with this power is able to interpret when another person speaks in tongues and is able to tell if a spirit is a demon or the Holy Spirit. The Reverend Bhengu had the gift of

healing. Many persons afflicted with diseases or infirmities came to his crusades for healing. When people are saved, they tend to remain – out of loyalty and a sense of gratitude.

During crusades the Reverend Bhengu shouted his trademark slogan – Back To God, *Buyelani KuThixo*. “*Phumani ematshoweni. UThixo ulihlabele ithole lakhe elinguJesu,*” he yelled one evening at Etipini, a refuse dump. In response to his preaching many thieves surrendered items of furniture that they had stolen. A huge truck was filled with these items and taken to the police station. Some thugs and gangsters surrendered their weapons. The Reverend’s fame spread. The press carried stories on his spiritual work. Sometimes Geoffrey was left alone to man the fort when the Reverend Bhengu left for Durban or Pietermaritzburg. Geoffrey loved evangelizing work and was equal to the task with which Reverend Bhengu had entrusted him.

What remained now was for Reverend Bhengu to consolidate the work in Rhodesia. Who better than the man who had been apprenticed to Reverend Bhengu to shoulder that challenging work? But Geoffrey seemed entrenched in crusade work in South Africa. But the Lord works in His own way. When the Lord says move, you must move. An invitation came for Geoffrey to visit Sweden. The offer was too good to turn down. Accordingly, Geoffrey’s passport was sent to the Swedish embassy in Pretoria in order to obtain a visa. At this point a telegram came from the Assemblies of God office, a message that would put paid to all plans to visit Sweden. The message read, ‘Father ill. Critical. Come immediately.’ The urgent message gave Geoffrey sleepless nights. The challenge was how he would get to Rhodesia when he had no



travel documents. His passport was in Pretoria for the visa application to Sweden.

Geoffrey was in a predicament. He had no choice but seek alternative travel documents. But he faced a barrage of questions. How does a South African citizen have a sick father in Rhodesia? Geoffrey had no choice but to speak the truth. “I was born there.” “You are travelling to Sweden on our travel documents, enjoying all the benefits. You go and bury your father and come back.” This was a serious threat. Geoffrey at the time did not comprehend the full import of what the immigration officer was saying. He flew out of Johannesburg and landed at the Bulawayo International Airport (now the Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo International Airport) where he found Luke Khumalo waiting for him. Luke Khumalo was the man who later became the head of Tegwane Secondary School. He was killed during the Gukurahundi campaign in Matabeleland in the early 80s. Geoffrey’s father Bizeni was buried in the Luveve Cemetery, within the section reserved for the pioneers of Luveve Township. With all the funeral arrangements behind him, Geoffrey began to think about what awaited him back in South Africa. He decided to ask his uncle Cephas Hlabangana to help him get a passport. Cephas Hlabangana, Rhodesia’s first black university graduate, was a member of parliament then. Through his position he was able to help Geoffrey obtain a passport. The next hurdle to be cleared was getting a birth certificate. Geoffrey was not new to the business of getting false documents. Had he not gone to South Africa in the first instance using a false identity? Here he was again, engaging in corrupt practices. Perhaps that was the way of the Lord, to get him back to Rhodesia permanently. After all, when he

got the message in Sweden, it was clear – he was to go to Rhodesia to serve the Lord.

For the birth certificate he turned for assistance to a Mr Tshabalala, a family friend from Mbembesi. Tshabalala worked in the district commissioner's office. Geoffrey got the birth certificate. At the stroke of a pen Geoffrey became a Rhodesian – equipped with both passport and birth certificate. Connections can do wonders in the world of corrupt practices. Geoffrey now returned to Johannesburg. Two white police officers followed him to the car that was there to meet him. After a few questions they got his residential address in 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Alexandra. He was there for just two nights when the police came to pick him up.

### **Picked Up and Deported**

He was remanded in custody at Newlands near Sophiatown while the police checked his records. He was there at the time when Sophiatown was being demolished under the Group Areas Act. The residents were being relocated to Meadowlands. At 4 o'clock each day the prisoners were locked in their cells for the night. They were let out the following day to enjoy temporary freedom outside the cells. Amongst the prisoners was a notorious boxer. Geoffrey went to the boxer with his bible and prayed for him in the name of Jesus. The boxer vowed he would not continue with his wicked ways. Soon word spread in the prison complex about this pastor who had delivered a technical knockout to the boxer. As a result Geoffrey was allowed to stay out of the cell until 8pm in the evening. The Bible and the pastor became allies in the prison complex – helping to calm down the wild elements.

The diet in the prison was as poor as it had been when Geoffrey was incarcerated before he sought salvation. The prisoners were given *isitshwala* (pap) and salt. In the evening they got *isitshwala* once again, but this time with oil. Eleanor used to take food to her husband. On Sundays the prisoners were brought together to listen to the word of God and a choir from Orlando came to sing.

When the authorities realized Geoffrey was an illegal immigrant, they decided that he be deported back to Rhodesia. Ministers of the Assemblies of God made every effort to intercede on his behalf. They pleaded on behalf of the church, arguing that Geoffrey was a useful member of the church and that he had contributed immensely towards its growth. He had, they argued, through his preaching, markedly reduced the levels of criminal activity in Alexandra. Potgieter, the Secretary General of the Assemblies of God, was one of those who pleaded on behalf of the church. He asked the prosecutor to leave Mkwanazi alone to continue his good works for the country. The prosecutor asked, “But who is this Mkwanazi, Mkwanazi? I could not fall asleep last night.” The prosecutor, would not, despite all the impassioned pleas, be swayed.

So, it appeared as if that was God’s will. “It was His plan that we go to Rhodesia,” said Eleanor. Church members prayed for Geoffrey. Ezekiel who was in South Africa visited his brother. He and Eleanor drove to Estrella to inform Geoffrey’s in-laws about what had befallen their son-in-law. Eleanor had been worried about how her parents were going to take the whole affair. It turned out her father already knew. “The Lord revealed to me that my son-in-law was locked up. Linky, the Lord says you must go to Rhodesia. The

Lord further showed me the released prisoners handcuffed in pairs. But my son-in-law was not in handcuffs. All this is God's plan." Ezekiel had been uncertain how Eleanor's parents would react. "All this is part of God's plan. Please do not be worried my children," said Eleanor's father with confidence, which reassured Ezekiel.

While his colleagues tried to intercede on behalf of Geoffrey, the prison began to look like a crusade venue. Sundays in particular were devoted to worship with the choir from Orlando coming to sing sweet melodies. The prison guards called upon the God-given prison pastor Reverend Mkwanzazi to preach to the prisoners. Some prisoners cried. The white prisoners rushed to Eleanor when she arrived with food for her husband and asked her to implore Geoffrey to pray for them.

The day came for Geoffrey's deportation. Church members from various assemblies gathered at Johannesburg's Park Railway Station. Many members of the church had heard about Geoffrey's detention at the Meadowlands Prison. Amongst the people assembled to witness Geoffrey's departure was the Reverend Bhengu. Meanwhile, at the prison, the guards said they were not going to handcuff Geoffrey. Through his preaching he had become a useful member of the prison community. He was tasked to look after several other prisoners who were awaiting deportation. With him, they were going to travel on the night train bound for Mafikeng and henceforth to Bulawayo. The deportees were given provisions for their trip – the amount depending on the distance to their destinations. Those going to Lobatsi in Botswana were given half a loaf. Deportees bound for Francistown were given a full loaf.

The deportees going furthest, that is to Plumtree and Bulawayo, were each given a loaf and a half.

Geoffrey was among the last to be taken out of prison and driven to the Railway Park Station. The deportees were handcuffed in twos and thrown into an awaiting motor van that took them to the Park Station. The crowd became restive as the prisoners began to arrive in twos. There was anxiety on the faces of Geoffrey's friends. Some dreaded to see their friend and pastor arrive in handcuffs. One person knew that would not be the case. The person was Eleanor who had been assured by her father that the Lord had revealed to him that his son-in-law would not arrive in handcuffs. The Reverend Bhengu had also been told of Eleanor's father's dream. The Reverend Bhengu had always told Reverend Mkwanazi that the Lord had revealed to him that he (Geoffrey) should go to Salisbury.

As soon as the van carrying the last lot of deportees arrived Eleanor ran towards it. Tension reached fever pitch. The women started crying. They feared seeing their pastor in handcuffs. The Secretary General Mr Potgieter was there too. There were sighs of relief all around when Geoffrey emerged. There were no handcuffs on his wrists. Instead he was clutching a Bible in his hand. The women praised the Lord. Reverend Bhengu stepped forward and said to Geoffrey, "I just thought I should come to see you off." He then proceeded to conduct an impromptu farewell service in honour of Geoffrey. "God make Reverend Geoffrey Mkwanazi love his people." The church members had brought plenty of provisions – roasted and fried chickens and fruits. Many members wanted Geoffrey to pray for them. As the train pulled off Eleanor and their

two children were there to see him off. The children yelled, “Daddy, daddy!” Those who had come to bid Geoffrey farewell lined up next to the train as far as the end of the platform. They all wanted Geoffrey to lay his hands on them. Geoffrey, upper body out of the train window, touched the heads of those lining the platform – right up to the end. Soon the train was swallowed by the hungry thick night. This marked the sad departure from South Africa, but marked the happy start of Geoffrey’s work in Rhodesia.

In Gaborone Geoffrey alighted from the train as his sister Brightness, who was just about to go overseas, lived there. The political situation in Rhodesia, following the declaration of independence by Prime Minister Ian Douglas Smith, was untenable. Arrests of black people had become the order of the day. At the University of Zimbabwe some students had been expelled and left the country via Botswana, which had attained independence in 1966, under the leadership of Sir Seretse Khama. That was the start of black Rhodesians leaving for the diaspora. Brightness later became the personal secretary of Bulawayo’s first black town clerk, Dr Michael M Ndubiwa. Geoffrey’s three sisters, Annette, Brightness and Ruth had bought a house in the African suburb of Tshabalala. They had no immediate use for the house. They had planned to let the house to a man called Xaba but once it was known Geoffrey was coming the house was reserved for him. He lived in the house while he awaited the arrival of his family.

### **Eleanor and Children Join Geoffrey in Rhodesia**

Eleanor and the children followed Geoffrey to Rhodesia. Although her father had given her some rudimentary driving lessons back on their rural farm, Eleanor did not have a driving licence. Ezekiel

offered to drive the family as far as the border. Pastor Maphosa had offered to drive them but pulled out at the last minute. Ezekiel's problem was that he did not have a passport so he was unable to cross the border into Rhodesia. At the border they had to be economical with the truth. They told the immigration officials that Ezekiel had to go back to work. "Can you drive?" the police asked Eleanor. "No," came her response. "But he can take you there, can't he?" "No, he has to go back to work." The police at the border believed the story and offered to drive the family across the border into Rhodesia. Eleanor and the children had been in touch with Geoffrey in Bulawayo and he had gone to Beitbridge to meet them. Unfortunately, they had not indicated that the car was being permanently imported into Rhodesia. The anomaly was rectified later. Their household property including wardrobes, plates and cutlery from Sweden and other items were picked up by Clan Transport from their former home in Alexandra.

### **Church Growth Starts in Bulawayo**

At the time of the arrival of the Mkwanazis, the Assemblies of God was not sufficiently rooted in Bulawayo. The Canadian Assemblies of God was based in Njube. MaNgwenya (who died in 2011), Peter Mackenzie Mavengeranwa's wife, had converted to the Assemblies of God, though not to the Back To God Crusade that Reverend Bhengu had initiated and nurtured. Mavengeranwa, also known as Sibanda had been saved at the time of Kupara of ZAOGA. Geoffrey had been in touch with the members of the Assemblies of God during his earlier visit to see his parents. He had come back again, this time to introduce his wife and child to his parents. He had seized the opportunity to do some preaching during his short stay. His parents had been converted to the London Missionary Society.

Through their son's preaching both his parents converted to Assemblies of God. Some people queried his parents' decision to move away from the London Missionary Society at their advanced age. Others that came on board were Eve Maphosa (Mrs Mkwanzazi) and MaHlabangana. Christopher, the politician, did not convert to the Assemblies of God.

On another visit to Bulawayo Geoffrey had come with Pastor Nebe, a Xhosa preacher from Springs, who had also been to Pimville. His mission was to confirm the early converts in Bulawayo such as the Miya family, a Xhosa family living in Luveve. The Miyas had come from Port Elizabeth and so had connections with the Assemblies of God. In addition to the Miyas there was Luka Peter Ngwenya, who was converted in June 1969 by Pastor John Mnkandla, Mrs Mlaudzi (MaKhumalo) and others in Geoffrey's group that needed confirmation. Apparently, the Luveve assembly was the first to be established. In those early days the converts included Robert (Ngwenya's brother), Mrs Gumede, Mrs Mathe (Naka Joseph), Naka Selinah, Mrs Ngwenya (MaNleya) and Naka James. Their confirmation was not consolidated as had been planned as Geoffrey went back to South Africa. Ngwenya started praying to the Lord that they be given a pastor. So to them the deportation of Reverend Mkwanzazi was an answer to their prayers. The new converts in Bulawayo needed a pastor to boost the activities of the church in Bulawayo. In Highfield, Salisbury, the spark that the Reverend Bhengu introduced had leapt into a conflagration, despite the schism related strife caused by the departure of Reverend Guti and his followers.



The arrival of the Reverend Mkwanzazi was a new beginning. He had had a lot of experience conducting crusades under the mentorship of Reverend Bhengu. In his early work the two families that were pivotal were the Miyas from Mbembesi and the Mavengeranwas or Sibandas. There was also a white pastor from Johannesburg. Revivals were conducted in the Njube Grounds. It was important that there be a base where the church could take root. The fact that Geoffrey's parents lived in Luveve worked in his favour. The family connections yielded positive results. The Assemblies of God could not, in those early days, afford to construct their own buildings. Members' houses were used as venues for the services. When the population of converts grew, schools were used as venues. The Mkwanzazis used their own house in Tshabalala as a venue for the church services and, on occasion, boy scout premises were used as venues. But the Reverend always kept in touch with Luveve where Mathe gave them a room at Kangondo just beyond Chigumira shop. Mrs Sibanda (MaNgwenya) accompanied Geoffrey to his parents' house where services were also conducted. For the Easter Conventions the Beit Hall was used as a venue as it could accommodate more people. Food was prepared at the house of Geoffrey's parents as it was very close to the Beit Hall. Delegates came from as far afield as Wankie (now Hwange) where Geoffrey had been to visit. The people in Hwange did not know the Reverend Bhengu, unlike those from Salisbury and Gwelo (now Gweru). They were under the Reverend Pastor Musasa. Worship at the time took place under trees and Pastor Musasa's favourite chorus was "*Uyai tinamate Mwari!*" Meanwhile, Gibson Nkomo in Bulawayo, had become a pastor without any formal training. Later he benefited from attendance at the Christian Centre Bible School, a Pentecostal facility. More and

more people underwent training to minister to the growing congregation. Luka Ngwenya became a pastor and Pastor Obed Masuku had become one previously. Joseph Mathe went to train at a Bible School in Salisbury. He became active among the youth and also visited hospitals to pray for the sick. In particular, he visited the victims of the influenza epidemic in 1919.

From 1969 church expansion grew in leaps and bounds. The Assemblies of God was active in Tshabalala, Njube, Luveve and Mzilikazi townships. Mrs Nkomo and Mrs Miya went to Mzilikazi to preach the gospel. Dominic Mkhosi, an art instructor at the Mzilikazi Art and Craft Centre, was an active elder. His brother, who used to work in a municipal bar, had converted to the Assemblies of God in Port Elizabeth and he trained the church choir. He however left the church before he died. His wife MaMdalose remained with the Assemblies of God. Timothy Nleya lived at Njube and he came to the Assemblies of God after deserting a Pentecostal Church under Pastor Mazaranhanga.

Reverend Mkwanazi was recognized as the senior pastor who had brought the work of the Assemblies of God from South Africa. He was very active and organized church work in Gwelo, Wankie, and Salisbury. Through his coordinating and uniting efforts he managed to bring all the assemblies to the Beit Hall in Luveve for Easter conventions. For the Christmas conventions they gathered at Gwelo where people he had invited from Malawi attended. One such man was Kalambala, an old man in the service of God in Malawi. Some invited speakers came from South Africa, Pastor Majola from Pretoria and Pastors Pege and Gilbert Nkomo from Johannesburg. The latter two were good with youth work. From

Giyani in South Africa came Pastor Kwinika who was good at church growth. The Gwelo conventions sometimes took place in the Roman Catholic Cathedral. “It is nice to be young Baba. I used to organize,” remembered Geoffrey with a sense of nostalgia. Mangena organized the beast to be slaughtered for the delegates. The carcass was dressed, cut up and put in the boot of Geoffrey’s *Mercedes Benz 300D*. He sometimes drove to Lower Gwelo (now Lower Gweru) to purchase goats, which were slaughtered for the conference delegates. Pastor Musasa owned a Fargo truck, which he used to collect firewood.

“*Sivel’ ekudeni Baba Nyathi ngal’ umsebenzi.*” We have come a long way with this work” he said with a heavy sigh.

The early pioneering meetings or cottage services were conducted in houses. Friends and acquaintances came to worship together. Reverend Mkwanazi used his house in Tshabalala as a springboard for the conversions. The cottage strategy involved a small number of people who knew each other intimately. The distances travelled to attend services were minimal. This was a way of saving costs as was not having to hire venues. Mathamsanqa Dube recalled a house in Old Luveve that was used for cottage meetings. That was way back in the seventies before the Assemblies of God had constructed church structures. There were similar cottage meetings in Pumula, Njube, Tshabalala, Mpopoma and Magwegwe. When the number of converts increased, cottage meetings became unsuitable. Bigger venues were needed and public buildings were rented and used as venues for the meetings. Masuku, Maphisa, Gampu, Mpumelelo primary schools were among the schools that were used. Beit Hall and Njube Hall were two of the municipal halls that were hired for use, in particular for the bigger

conferences. Cottage, classroom and hall venues were from time to time complemented by tented crusades, in particular for visiting pastors. This was the case both in 1973 and in 1974 when Reverend Bhengu pitched tents in Bulawayo for great revivals. The final stage in church growth was the construction of church buildings. The first to be built was Njube in 1974, and it was followed by the Queen's Park church building in 1986, the year the white assemblies were closing down in Zimbabwe. The third church building to be put up was in Nkulumane and in the 1990s the Luveve structure was erected. The structure at Mzilikazi is not yet complete. There are stands at several other townships awaiting development. There are stands at Mahatshula and Nketa too, where Pastor Masuku is in charge.

### **Expansion into Rural Areas**

Church work grew, particularly in Bulawayo. Soon there was an assembly in Pumula. However, the greatest challenge was taking church work to the rural areas of Matabeleland. The challenges came in the form of shortage of resources, personnel and, most importantly, the security challenges presented by the escalating liberation war. In Mashonaland work had spread from Salisbury to Marirangwe. Some work had also spread from Mutare to other parts of Manicaland. Outside of Matabeleland there was a meaningful presence in rural areas.

Historically, the various church denominations established churches in the new urban areas. For example, following the conquest of Matabeleland in 1893, several church denominations were set up in Bulawayo. White churches were set up in the areas set aside for whites. In the case of blacks, the church buildings were

established within the Location, later known as Makokoba. The churches included Roman Catholic, Anglican, Salvation Army, Wesleyan Methodist, Seventh Day Adventist and the Church of Christ, among others. From their urban bases they spread out to the rural areas where they were given farm land to set up mission stations. The Anglican Church, for example, established Cyrene Mission, while the Wesleyan Methodists set up Tegwani Mission. There were two notable exceptions to this general picture, namely the Brethren In Christ Church (BICC) and the London Missionary Society (LMS). The former set up its headquarters, not in town but in a rural area. It established Matopo Mission and other missions such as Wanezi and Mtshabezi. The latter was established during the days of the Ndebele State. The LMS sought a place to establish Inyathi Mission from King Mzilikazi. That was way back in 1859 and another mission station was established at Hope Fountain when Lobengula became king in 1870.

### **Urbanisation – Industrialisation and Pentecostalism**

The Assemblies of God was to go the same route as other churches, by spreading from towns to the rural areas. The siting of conventional churches in towns was as a result of their being established by whites, who settled with their secular kith and kin and created town settlements for themselves. The white missionaries divided themselves into those ministering to whites in urban centres and those who ministered to the blacks, both in segregated urban churches and the rural mission stations. In the case of Pentecostal churches they were part and parcel of urbanization and the alienation that went with the process. The racist policies in the country led to the blacks being offered lower wages than their white counterparts. Their accommodation was of

a poor quality. Blacks in urban areas faced tough socio-economic conditions. Without the vote there was little hope of them changing their material conditions. The alienating social and political environment contributed to the growth of gangsterism, drug abuse, prostitution and other social vices. The urban blacks adapted to their conditions in different ways. One course open to them was to embrace Pentecostalism. At least that faith gave meaning to their existence and attended to some of their immediate needs. Healing was an important tenet of the faith and had always been an important aspect of African Traditional Religion. Generally, those who sought salvation within the context of Pentecostalism abandoned smoking and drinking and that translated into better health and more available income for other social needs. There were benefits that accrued to industry as well with reduced absenteeism due to illness. Productivity was enhanced. Given the ecstatic nature of Pentecostalism it became a natural choice for the urban alienated blacks. Later, its promise of wealth gave it a good grounding among the urban black professionals, especially in the post-independence period. For Pentecostalism, locating in urban centres was inevitable. Even in the United States it was associated with industrialization.

In the midst of all this hectic work, a baby girl was born to the Mkwanazis on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 1971 at Tshabalala Clinic belonging to and run by the Bulawayo City Council. She was named Nobizo Eleanor, affectionately called Nopsi. Nobizo was a name derived from '*ubizo lwenkosi*' meaning the call of God, to which her parents had responded and applied dedicated service. Born late in the lives of the Mkwanazis, she became a spoilt child. At the time of her birth both parents were full time ministers. That meant from a

tender age of seven years, Nobizo attended boarding school and thus lived away from her parents. She attended Embakwe Roman Catholic School for the Colourdes. At one time the three siblings were attending the same school. In 1978 at the height of the liberation war, Embakwe was closed down. Nobizo briefly attended Sacred Heart School at Esigodini. Her incessant crying led to her parrenys transferring her to Carmel School in Bulawayo.

### **Further Expansion**

While the urban centres were the nodal points where westernization spread to the periphery, the rural areas were also following in the footsteps of the cities. Ideas generated in urban centres filtered into the peripheral areas. Whereas in the past, African Traditional Religion had provided meaning to life, it no longer did. The harassed centre could no longer sustain the web of meanings, hopes and aspirations. The conventional churches fell short of African aspirations. Pentecostalism provided some form of continuity in terms of African expectations on the role of religion – that is, its functionality.

From Bulawayo the Assemblies of God began to spread to distant rural areas. Once the church was planted in one area, the converts in turn planted it in nearby areas. The visits by urban agents helped strengthen the position of the new converts. When some of the rural converts went into towns to participate in Easter and Christmas conventions, this helped to integrate them into the family of the Assemblies of God. This mode of transmission created blocks where Assemblies of God became operational. Consolidation of such rural areas led to the creation of blocks or spheres of influence. Once an assembly was established at Matabo

not far from West Nicholson, more centres were established at Gwanda and West Nicholson. Gwanda town was the centre for many areas and served as the springboard into areas south of it. In terms of language, the area south of Gwanda was occupied by the Babirwa people, who spoke Sebirwa, a Northern Sotho dialect. It was easy for the people in a given locality to spread the message of the Assemblies of God within an area sharing a common culture and being close in geographical terms. Sebirwa became the medium for the transmission of the Assemblies of God faith. This was the case where the local converts were at work. Those who came from Bulawayo, including Eleanor and Geoffrey, were not Sebirwa speakers. In any case, the message is better received when brought by known people who speak the same language as the targeted group. Once the Assemblies of God was established in Gwanda it soon spread to areas such as Nhwali, Dibilashaba (actually Dibilanshabe) and Ntepe.

Wankie had had the Assemblies of God long before the advent of Reverend Mkwanazi. They were not however of the Back to God persuasion. Their creation was not as a result of the efforts of Reverend Bhengu or his agents. A number of assemblies had been set up by Pastor Mkolo, an elderly man who lived at Number 3 Compound, and Peter Dube, a youth at the time, who lived at Number 1 Compound. These Wankie assemblies had no problem working with other Assemblies of God. From Wankie the Assemblies of God spread in the general area. The Hwange National Park had led to the removal of people from certain areas. The construction of the railway line from Bulawayo to Victoria Falls had also led to removals of some villages along the way. There were conservancies and farms that had been set up following the



eviction of people from their traditional homes. The establishment of assemblies coincided with the distribution of African settlements. The Nambya and Dombe (a Tonga people) settlements near Hwange also included people who had been evicted from the heart of Matabeleland, including from Esigodini, Matobo and Lower Gweru. These evictees were settled at Jambezi under Chief Mvuthu, the son of Xukuthwayo Mlotshwa, chief at Entembeni. The Assemblies of God was established at Mabale, a Dombe speaking area under Chief Nelukoba, Jambezi and Kamativi Tin Mine. Eleanor and Geoffrey went there to pave the way at Jambezi. Jambezi, not far from Victoria Falls, is characterized by deep Kalahari sands. Geoffrey's car got stuck in the sand and oxen were inspanned to come and pull it out. At some point people also came to assist by pushing the car. There was great joy and jubilation when the car was freed and the Reverend and Mrs Mkwanazi were able to meet the people and deliver the word of God. In some rural areas transport is a real challenge. Eleanor remembered times when she got on to buses plying rural routes. The converts would be waiting for her. When she disembarked from the rural bus, she would find a donkey-pulled scotch cart waiting to take her to some remote area where she was going to preach.

Meanwhile work continued to grow in Bulawayo. It was still the period when meetings were taking place in houses and classrooms. The Tshabalala house where the Mkwanazis lived had two bedrooms, a lounge and a kitchen. The lounge was used as the venue for the services. Charity begins at home. The first people that Eleanor and Geoffrey targeted were their neighbours. One neighbour, Mrs Ndlovu, sought salvation and joined the Mkwanazis in worship at the Tshabalala house. Another neighbour

was Mrs Nyathi whose household was Shona speaking. Gladstone, together with Tapera, the son of the Nyathis, were among the first converts in the locality. The converts enjoyed singing choruses together in the lounge. Some residents in the locality began wondering how a man from South Africa was able to bring the Ndebele and Shona together. Nxumalo was one among many who marvelled at the wonders that the pastor from South Africa was able to perform. Geoffrey's response to such men was, "the Gospel alone can bring us together. Tribalism does not work." Eleanor's position had always been one of revulsion at the divisive tendencies of white missionaries. "I was angry with them. They segregated us. They despised us. We also love to be different, for example the Shona and the Ndebele." Mrs Mkwanzazi, Austin's wife, brought her children to the service at the Mkwanzazi household. "We saw how Geoffrey's parents abandoned the London Missionary Society in favour of the Assemblies of God." Birds of a feather flock together. Like the senior Mkwanzazis, Austin's wife was attracted to a pastor of the same family. Mrs Mhlanga, a gifted person spiritually, and Leonard's wife, who ran a business at Mhlahlandlela, also joined the increasing number of converts that worshiped the Lord at the Tshabalala house. Many others in the neighbourhood came to seek salvation through the efforts of Reverend Mkwanzazi and Eleanor. The Mkwanzazis stayed at Mhlahlandlela until they undertook a cooling off trip to America. That trip, undertaken in 1979, was at the insistence of the Reverend Bhengu, who felt the Mkwanzazis needed a break from the strife that had broken out within the Assemblies of God in Zimbabwe, a strife that was taking its toll on the Mkwanzazis. Even at the time of their departure for the United States there was not a single church building for the Assemblies of God in Bulawayo. Schools, such as

Masuku Government School in Tshabalala, and, at times, youth centres were being rented and used as places of worship. In Njube, the Assemblies of God rented space for worship from the Lutheran Church.

This slow pace in constructing church buildings of their own was not unique to the Assemblies of God. The Pentecostal movement was different from the mainstream churches that came as part of the colonial expansion. The latter churches remained under the direction and control of the overseas authorities where the headquarters of the churches were located. There was substantial funding from the overseas parent churches. Church growth in the colony was dependent to a very large extent on overseas financial support, including the stipends for their missionaries from overseas. This was not the case with the Pentecostals. While some people, such as the Reverend Bhengu, had contacts in the United States who helped with funding, church growth was left in the hands of local pastors and their assemblies, who spearheaded infrastructural development.

Even where overseas funding was available, the Pentecostals, as a general rule, did not have missionaries as the other mainstream churches had. The missionaries provided the link with the overseas headquarters and became the conduit for the transmission of funds to the colonies. Such missionaries were trusted by the overseas church above the Africans. This was certainly the case after independence, as funding was scaled down when Africans were increasingly in the driving seat. Furthermore, the spiritual nature of the Pentecostals does not easily lend itself to bureaucratic structures that provide the guidance and administrative resources

needed in infrastructural development. Spiritual healing does not require infrastructure. Besides, the Holy Spirit, which is at the centre of Pentecostalism, demands open spaces. It is for this reason that some apostolic congregations meet under trees so that, when the Holy Spirit comes down and the person is tossed around, there are no material inhibitions to the individual's uncontrolled movement. The picture changed markedly later, especially after independence, when the Pentecostal movement was led and pushed by the wealthy elite. The elite were products of the mainstream churches in which they were no longer, unlike their parents, getting spiritual satisfaction. Prestigious buildings were either built or buildings such as former cinemas, supermarkets and factories were purchased to house the movement. For the Assemblies of God, imposing structures such as those in Luveve, Highfield and Njube are recent phenomena.

Near Tshabalala, a township named after the family name of King Lobengula's mother Fulatha Tshabalala, is the up-market, by colonial standards, settlement of Mhlahlandlela. The name means pathfinders. The name was that of King Mzilikazi's capital town when he and his people were still in South Africa. The capital was on the Aapias River in present day Pretoria. Once in Zimbabwe, the name of his last capital town was also Mhlahlandlela. An American company was contracted to build a few demonstration houses. About thirty-eight houses were constructed in that experimental scheme. The most affluent among the Bulawayo blacks went to live in the new township. Ezekiel had lived in a flat in Mhlahlandlela. Before he vacated the flat he announced his plans to allow the Mkwanzazis to come and live there. The opinion of neighbours was sought. The area was high class comprising

teachers, businessmen and other members of the elite. There were no objections to the Mkwanazis moving to the area. The flat had three bedrooms, a kitchen, lounge and toilet.

Sizinda is a high-density western suburb that was established to accommodate workers of the Rhodesia Railways. The other township that was established for the same purpose was Matshobana, the name of founding Ndebele King Mzilikazi's father. Sizinda was the name of a village or regiment during the heydays of the Ndebele State. Its chief was Maphisa Fuyana. At Sizinda there was a government school named Maphisa. In the township, meetings initially took place in houses but, as the Assemblies of God adherents increased in numbers, the services were then held in the classrooms at Maphisa Primary School. The same was happening in Mpopoma, a township with prefabricated houses built soon after the cessation of hostilities of World War II. Initially, the meetings took place in the house belonging to Mr and Mrs Madeya. Another house that was used as a meeting place was one belonging to Sis Eve. Again, when the numbers of converts increased, classrooms at Mpumelelo Government Primary School were made use of. Both Eleanor and Geoffrey were in the thick of efforts to consolidate and expand the work of the Assemblies of God. Eleanor preached in particular to the youth who she taught good living. She took the young people to camps, the Matobo Hills, with their majesty and splendour, being the setting. The balancing rocks, castle kopjes and whale backs interspersed with thickly wooded forests, wetlands and perennial streams were a great attraction. Maleme Dam with its chalets was the site for many youth camps. Pastors also used the camp-sites for the prayers and retreats. The youth were keen on sports and as a way of attracting

them and retaining them within the church, a varied sporting programme was put in place. The young people also used Ngwenya's farm for their camps.

### **Political Independence and Demise of White Assemblies**

The granting by the British government of independence to Zimbabwe brought tremendous hope to young and old alike. Some imagined there would be positive change in their personal economic status. There was disillusionment, especially in Matabeleland, where their party PF-ZAPU lost elections and there was strife from 1982 until the signing of the sham 22 December 1987 'Unity Accord'. Many whites decided to leave for South Africa, while others headed for overseas destinations.

Some disgruntled youth turned to the Lord. "Today there are youth members in the Njube Assembly that I do not know," Geoffrey noted. This declaration emphasised how this pioneering assembly in Bulawayo-Njube had grown. The big church building in Njube is opposite Insukamini Government Primary School. The phenomenal growth of the Assemblies of God is not unique to this particular church. Rather it is within the general context of the Pentecostal movement. All in all there are no less than twenty-three assemblies throughout the townships in Bulawayo.

Against the background of phenomenal growth within the black population there was a decline in white membership of the church. At independence everyone wanted to be independent of everyone else. Initially the whites, as in South Africa, wielded tremendous power as they were in control of the national executive. Prior to independence there had never been a black chairman of the

national executive. Before independence the white members of the Assemblies of God had separate assemblies as was the case in South Africa. There was thus parallelism occasioned by racist considerations. The Executive Committee though was multi-racial. The whites were no longer keen to be controlled from South Africa and they would not be comfortable under black control and leadership. It was clear they were going to lose control of chairing the Assemblies of God. It was expected that the constitution would be amended so that it was in line with the new political reality obtaining in Zimbabwe. Prior to independence, Reverend Bhengu and Reverend Bond were the overseers of the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God. When the constitution was revisited in the wake of independence the clause relating to oversight was removed. They sought to relate to the wider world where they would be free to solicit donations and would not have to be accountable to the General Assembly in South Africa. While the whites were keen to remove control by South Africa, the blacks were keen to be independent of whites. Reverend Bhengu was conscious of the new dynamic unfolding in Zimbabwe. He wanted unity in the black work, both in South Africa and Zimbabwe. He called a meeting of blacks alone to discuss the issue. In Reverend Bhengu's view there was need to win the confidence of whites in Zimbabwe. That could happen if they retained some crucial posts within the national executive. If they could not retain the chair, they could at least keep the secretary's post.

As a privileged and better educated group, the whites were thoroughly au fait with the Assemblies of God constitution. As it turned out Reverend Mkwanazi became the first black chairman of the National Executive. In order to retain some racial balance, A B

Robertson became the secretary. Reverend Bhengu's foresight made him alert to the fact that to counter the whites he would need to bring the young and the educated into the administration. All along most blacks in the church had concerned themselves with evangelism and matters spiritual. The post-independence period saw this group, now poised to assume leadership positions, seeking a better understanding of the constitution.

At the same time, whites sought to minimize the influence and control of Reverend Bhengu in particular and of blacks in general. With their financial muscle they sought to win some of the pastors to their side. While this was happening, the Reverend Bhengu did not help the situation by calling the blacks to meetings on their own. He was not particularly interested in following the constitution in terms of stipulated notice to call meetings. As founder of the Back To God Crusade, he was the de facto spiritual leader of black work within the Assemblies of God, both in South Africa and Zimbabwe. This was the complex dynamic that Reverend Mkwanazi, as the first black chairman, faced. It was a situation that required a global picture of the unfolding scenario. Nationality, race, ethnicity and individual ambition and interest all came to bear on the developing dynamic.

Geoffrey had been preceded as chairman by Pastor A B Robertson, who in turn had been preceded by Pastor Gibbs, who left for Cape Town. The racially divided church sought to develop in tandem with the political reality prevailing in the country. Unfortunately many would not swallow their racial pride. It was such die hard racist Christians who chose to leave the country. Those whites who could not countenance living under black rule left for South Africa



in particular, but others went to overseas countries such as Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. The number of whites remaining in Bulawayo was so small that their churches were threatened with closure. When, for example, Pastor Mundell of the Beshern Assembly in Famona, went to South Africa their church buildings were sold. In Gweru the church building for white members of the Assemblies of God was sold to the black Apostolic Faith Mission.

### **Church Structures**

There was a time when South Africa was a district of the Assemblies of God, America. Periodically the governance structure was altered until South Africa became a national church, operating independently of the United States. South Africa-Zimbabwe relations followed the same route until the latter, getting the cue from political independence, campaigned for, and achieved, national autonomy. Be that as it may, the Zimbabwean constitution of the Assemblies of God was crafted along the broad outlines of the South African constitution.

Within the Assemblies of God the highest structure is the national conference, which is biennial. The conference is called by the National Executive. The constitution spells out who shall attend the biennial conference. The general rule is one delegate per twenty- five members. Where an assembly has more than fifty members, two delegates may attend the national conference. A pastor and two elders from each assembly are entitled to attend the national conference. The Executive Committee is elected by the national conference that then meets to elect a chairman. The other members of the National Executive are as follows: vice chairman,

secretary, vice secretary, treasurer and two trustees. The Executive Committee does not interfere with the running of districts but does issue credentials to pastors. Pastors who preach in the prisons are issued with letters of introduction from the Executive Committee. Each district has its own district council that oversees the running of the province. It has seven members who constitute the council. The four districts are Matabeleland, Midlands, Mashonaland and Manicaland. A pastor moving to another region has to produce a letter of introduction to give to the receiving district council. Below the district council there is the Ministers Fellowship who meet monthly to discuss spiritual matters.

The lowest level structure is the local assembly, such as Njube or Luveve, where the pastor is the spiritual leader. The deacon takes care of the material side of things such as the finances and church property. The elders take care of spiritual issues and undertake preaching functions in the absence of the pastor. Within each assembly there is a seven member committee that runs the affairs of the assembly. Control is in the hands of the men of the assembly. It is argued that pastors come and go, but the men constitute the permanent arm of the assembly – hence the vesting of power in them.

### **Revenue Sources**

There are two major sources of revenue within the church. The first is free will offerings where a vessel, usually an ilala (palm) basket is circulated amongst the worshippers. The worshipper is at liberty to offer whatever amount he/she wishes. Money collected through offerings is used for church maintenance and the payment of rates. The second is tithing, where a member surrenders 10% of

his/her salary (*okwetshumi*) to the church. This 10% is the more substantial amount and is deemed to belong to the Lord, and is used to pay the pastors. In addition to these the Reverend Bhengu initiated a programme through which the women were to have their own funds, the money coming from the sale of handicrafts and other self-help projects. Some of this money went towards improvement of household livelihoods, while the bulk was used for winning souls and for hosting revivals. In South Africa the money raised was used to buy trucks, vans and tents for the evangelizing crusade. The evangelists would be camped at a single site for as long as three months. Cars and tents were all inscribed boldly with the words: Back To God. In more affluent South Africa such monies ran into millions of Rand.

Reverend Bhengu always wanted the church to be self reliant, that way, the church could achieve dignity and a sense of independence. In fact, it is this self-reliance that has seen the Pentecostal movement grow by leaps and bounds through indigenous funding. There have been claims, though, that western countries injected a lot of money into the Pentecostal movement during the Cold War era. The Pentecostal movement was to serve as a bulwark against both communism and Islam. Related to this thrust was the funding of Christian films in Nigeria aimed at discrediting African Traditional Religion. Indeed, in Nollywood films, there is a lot of the metaphysical which is a component of African Traditional Religion.

Easter conventions for women were the culmination of fund-raising efforts. There were weekly meetings, then monthly meetings and the annual meetings where women from the various assemblies gathered to bring their annual collections together. A spirit of competition among the women of different districts was

engendered. For example, in the 2011 women's annual meeting, Harare brought US\$18 000 while Bulawayo brought US\$10 000. While the spirit of competition increased the amounts that were collected and surrendered to the church, unhealthy friction sometimes resulted. Competition among the women was cited by Geoffrey as contributing towards the friction between the Mashonaland and Matabeleland districts. Men too have their own fund-raising at the local assembly. Whatever they raise goes towards infrastructural development. "We are failing on this front," Geoffrey stated.

The youth too were not left out on the fund-raising front. The money that they raised was used to make education grants, ranging from lower educational levels right up to tertiary level. The girls had the responsibility to buy office furniture. For example, furniture in Geoffrey's Fama house was purchased for him by the girls when he was chairman of the National Executive. "I love this furniture, it was purchased by the girls," he said as he cast a grateful look at the reclining chair on which he sat.

Christ for the Nations in the United States has an assistance scheme, where, if a local overseas assembly raises money for a building up to window level, they supply funding for the superstructure. This is the scheme that was used to build the churches at Njube, Marondera, and the Apostolic Faith Mission in Njube. Pastor Mackenzie's friends in the United States and Sweden assisted with the funding of the Luveve church building.

The Reverend Bhengu had contacts both in the United States and Sweden who made donations. However, no one seems certain

about his operations on the money front. Transparency was lacking. A lot of property was purchased in his own name, a practice that would have dire consequences on the church in Zimbabwe after his death. Now the church runs an office at Hermco Building along Sixth Avenue, between Main and Fort Streets in Bulawayo. The office is well equipped with computers, a boardroom and an office for the chairman of the National Executive and the projects officer. The office handles financial matters. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of each month the books of accounts are closed and a salary schedule is done. Ten percent of the funds collected are used to run the office. Form A1 is used for banking funds coming from the assemblies and A2 is used to withdraw funds from the bank. The chairman of the National Executive, Reverend Mkwanazi, the Treasurer/Trustee, Billy Mpofu and Pastor Luka Ngwenya are the signatories to the church's account. All three are members of the National Executive.

As the work grew, more and more pastors were sent out to consolidate the initial work undertaken by Reverend and Mrs Mkwanazi. In order to prepare them sufficiently, they were sent for pastoral training, some to Victory Fellowship run by Reverend Haskins, and others to Harvest House and Jesus International.

In South Africa training facilities for pastors were racially segregated. For the blacks there were two Bible schools, one in KwaZulu-Natal and another was established just outside Johannesburg, named after the late Reverend Bhengu and which had, at one time, a white principal. In the United States and Sweden there were multi-racial training facilities. The Canadian Pentecostal Assemblies of God had a Bible School in Harare. Some

Pastors of the Assemblies of God trained at the Harare facility. However, there were pastors who went into the field without any formal training. These were pastors who had answered the call to work for the Lord. As expected, such pastors lacked depth in their preaching and were found wanting when it came to providing growth beyond prayers.

At one time there were two volunteers who came to assist with training. One came from California and the other from South Africa. Their training programme lasted three months. They were present during the Easter conferences. In addition to these international trainers, the Assemblies of God enjoyed good relations with Dr Goodwill Shana's Word of Life, a Pentecostal church based in Bulawayo, though with branches elsewhere including the diaspora. "We are part of the (Pentecostal) church. We are part of the born-again movement," said Reverend Mkwanazi. Apart from this connection the Assemblies of God did not have strong relationships with other Pentecostal churches. The growth of the Assemblies of God in particular, and the Pentecostal movement in general, took place within areas that had been 'colonised' by main-stream churches. The latter were also growing, mainly through natural growth of the population. There was visible growth of Pentecostalism, initially within the urban areas. Its appeal to younger professionals was a boon to its strategy. Mainstream churches were patriarchal and tended to sideline both women and the youth. In this regard, the mainstream churches were perceived as perpetuating the African traditional gender bias. Masculinity enjoyed expression within the main-stream churches, in some of which women were not allowed to become pastors. The young professionals, both male and female in the towns, sought to

extricate themselves from the tight grip of the elderly males who provided leadership in the churches. The Assemblies of God is itself only just beginning to embrace women in positions of leadership.

### **Pentecostal Allure**

Within the Pentecostal movement both the young and women were accommodated. The spiritual thrust allowed these groups to take part in preaching. Spiritual endowment is not confined to the old and to males. It was the inclusion of the professional element within the ranks of the Pentecostal movement that ensured financial independence. At the same time there was a shift towards the use of modern technology as an integral part of taking the word of God to the people. The public address systems in use were powerful. Video-taped sermons by accomplished and powerful preachers were made use of by the innovative pastors. For some professionals within the Pentecostal movement the church sermons became part of the background music within their offices. The songs that were sung in the main-stream churches had been written in Europe many centuries ago. Some of the songs were inspired by the singing traditions of the peoples where the churches took root. The songs were then exported to Africa lock stock and barrel and pushed down the vocal cords of the Africans. African singing is characterised by rhythm and repetition and it can go on and on for a long time. It is this repetition that creates the conditions conducive to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Not only is there engagement in repetitive singing, but the singing is accompanied by dance. For the mainstream churches, in particular those based in Matabeleland, such as the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA), the Brethren In Christ Church (BICC) and the Free

Presbyterian Church of Scotland, dancing is shunned. The United Congregational Church of Southern Africa, is beginning to embrace dance, which is an important key to the African heart.

Whereas in the past basic musical instruments such as drums were used, the current generation within the Pentecostal movement uses modern equipment including modern drums, guitars, pianos and keyboards. Musical bands have been encouraged and during praise and worship sessions, the bands come into action and the atmosphere becomes electric. The youth then leap into action and enjoy themselves. The electric atmosphere is augmented by the lively and charismatic preaching by the pastors, who, in most cases, are young and relate well to the youngsters who form the bulk of the church membership. The young are by and large unmarried and the church provides a place to meet for the young men and women who can then marry within the church. The young generally have not yet faced life's challenges. It is the older members who come face to face with the challenges, including poor health, among other adult afflictions. The Pentecostal church provides divine healing which appeals to this category of worshipper. The free-to-view channels on television have attracted many viewers. There are pastors who have made it on to the international scene through their tele-preaching such as Pastor Chris and Pastor T B Joshua.

Social support is important for human beings. Church membership provides this kind of support, in particular within the urban set-up. Kinship structures in rural areas have traditionally provided the necessary support in times of need but, within the urban set-up, these kin-based support structures have often died down and been



replaced by associations of common interest. Burial societies, professional societies, clubs and the churches provide the new social groups within which social support is found. The Pentecostal movement is strong on social support. The sick in hospital are visited and, where death has occurred, the pastor and members of the church go to lend support to the bereaved family. This is the functional aspect of the church that appeals to would-be church-goers. The networks of support have been instrumental in making in-roads into the rural areas. The youth in the rural areas forge special relationships with their urban counterparts. The vulnerable elderly get material support in addition to spiritual support. While a few of the rural adherents of the mainstream churches remain loyal to their churches (they were often born into these churches), the younger generation, also born into the traditional churches, later find little spiritual satisfaction within their parents' churches. Many of the pastors in the Pentecostal movement belonged to traditional churches in their earlier days. However, their children are born into the Pentecostal movement. It remains to be seen whether the pastors, in their final days, will be able to continue attracting their children's generation. Is it not going to be a return to the patriarchy of the mainstream churches from which they fled in the first instance? The Assemblies of God, as a member of the Pentecostal movement, has had all the experiences enumerated above. For example at Mbizingwe in the Umzingwane District of Matabeleland South, they did not win older members from the Brethren In Christ Church and the Wesleyan Methodists Church that predominated in the area. Geoffrey remembered, "We were able to preach and win over to us the young souls," during the time of insecurity in the area with dissidents and the subsequent

Gukurahundi campaign. A number of whites were killed at a mission station in the area.

There were strategies that the Assemblies of God adopted that helped them win more souls for Christ. They emphasized the need to live well within marriages. The church preached sexual abstinence until after marriage – to be a virgin at the time of marriage was applauded as a virtue. In this time of the HIV-AIDS pandemic they have preached, not the gospel of the condom, but that of abstinence and being faithful to one partner. “Many youngsters who have respected their bodies have shown a lot of respect to us. Some of them were examined before marriage,” said Geoffrey.

When matters are not clear or puzzling to the young mind, questions are bound to crop up. In a strongly patriarchal environment the children must be seen and not heard. Failure or reluctance to answer the questions that the young put across can easily work against winning the souls of the young. A case in point is Mathamsanqa Dube, who grew up in Makokwe, in South Gwanda. The churches operating in his area were the Apostolic Faith Mission and the Lutheran Church, which was operating from Gungwe Mission. Makokwe was an outstation. When Mathamsanqa could not get answers from the pastor he became disillusioned and vowed he would not go to church again. He moved to Bulawayo where he stayed with his uncle Obert Ndlovu in Luveve Township, in a house they rented from Taurapi, a local businessman. In the house they stayed with Gogo Mashasha, whose son Absalom was a pastor in the Assemblies of God, and who, after marrying a Swazi woman, decided to stay in her country. In 1970

Dube was doing Form 2 at Luveve Secondary School. It was at this time when Gogo Mashasha fell ill. The local pastors of the Assemblies of God who knew Absalom got to know about Mashasha's illness and visited her to conduct prayers. Pastor Luke Mnkandla preached to Dube who was in the house. "The way the man preached was appealing, but on the first day I refused (to convert)". In the early days Pastor Absalom preached at Ndungwane, Dube's home area. A number of miraculous happenings took place when he preached. In his mind Dube expected no less than what his relative achieved in the early sixties. The second day of preaching came, and yet Dube did not experience what his cousin Absalom was capable of doing. The answer to that came from Reverend Mkwanzazi, who visited Gogo Mashasha together with Pastor Mnkandla. "It all depends on your faith," was the response from Reverend Mkwanzazi. That was enough to convert the young and inquisitive Dube. "In the Assemblies of God you are not captive to the leader's ideas as is the case in other churches," said Dube. "The other thing that I liked was that the young were given space. On Thursdays they had their opportunity to minister to each other. If the Minister was present, he sat down in the audience and listened to the young do their own thing." For Dube this was fulfilling and encouraged him to stay with the Assemblies of God to this day.



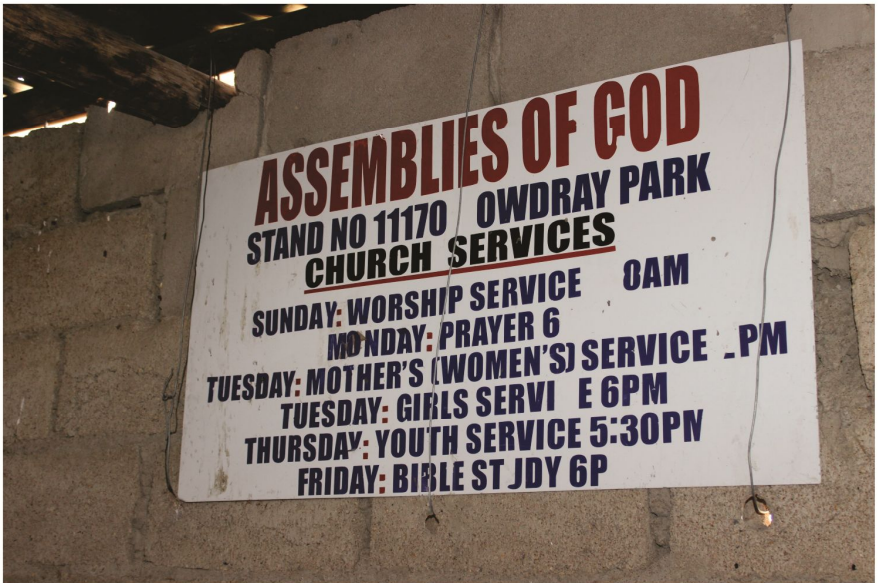








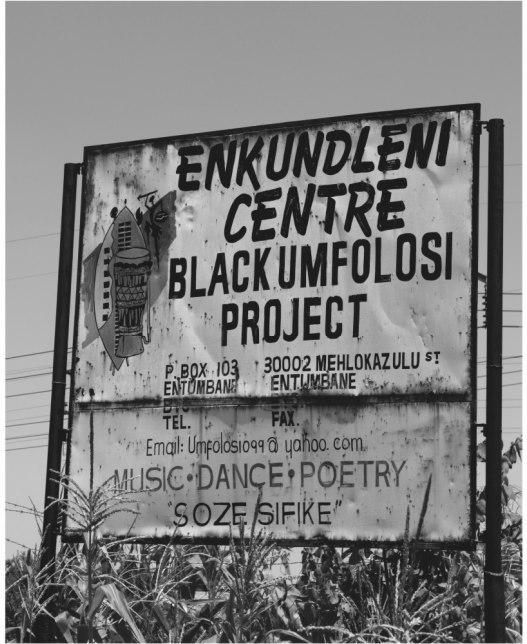












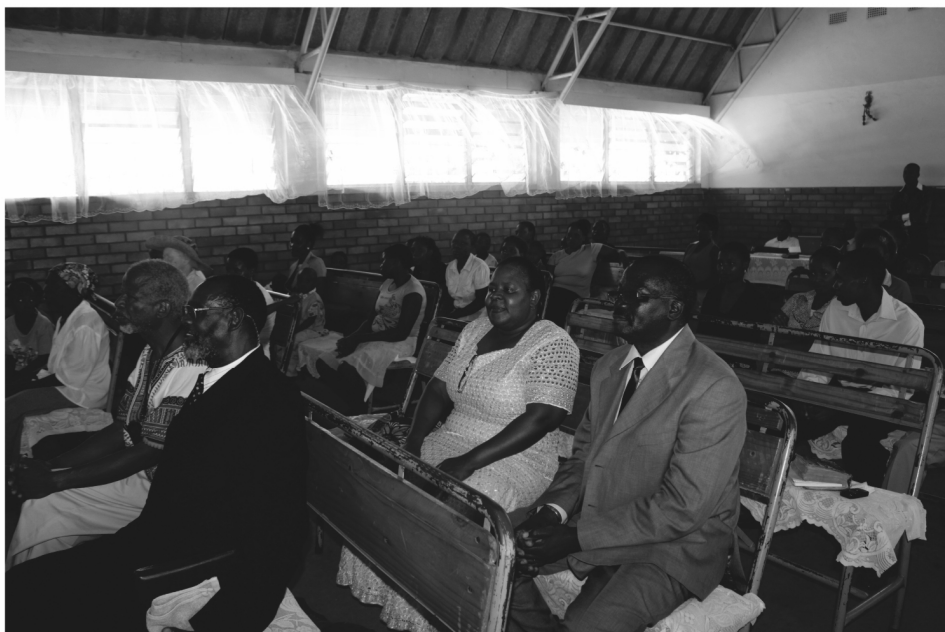
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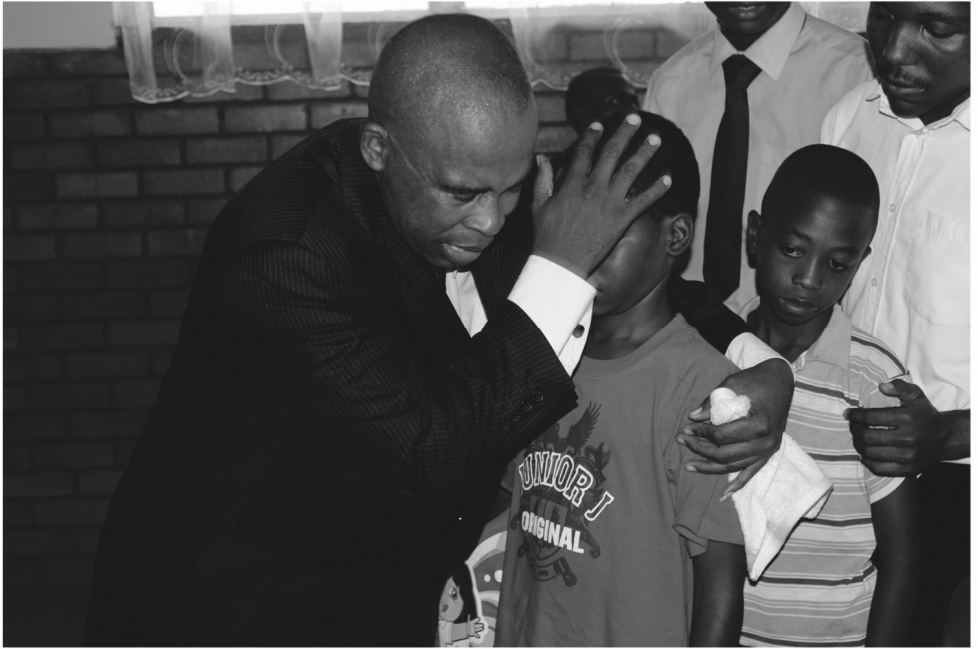






Queens Park Assembly





Queens Park Assembly









Nketa Assembly



## THE INTERCESSION GROUP MINISTRY TO TARGET:

- ▶▶ Prayer for the continual spiritual awakening of the Assembly - to be always on Business for God
- ▶▶ Pray that the Assembly be a living Healing Centre for the spirit, soul and body - the emotional hurt
- ▶▶ Pray for the Pastor, his family and generally for all families in the assembly.
- ▶▶ Pray for the word to be endowed by the anointing of the Holy Spirit - people to be pricked, convicted, converted, transformed, challenged, be broken hearted as the word is preached.
- ▶▶ Pray for the in-filling of the Holy Ghost of all brethren.
- ▶▶ Pray for the manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- ▶▶ Pray for the Youth, Sunday School, Mothers and Fathers' service
- ▶▶ Pray for the Worship Service
- ▶▶ Pray for the ministry of giving - Tithes, Offerings, Building fund, benevolence funds.
- ▶▶ Pray for the building projects funds and materials - Toilets and Sunday school Hall to be erected this year - Neh. 4 v 6
- ▶▶ Pray for the deliverance ministry to be raised. Demons to be cast, bondages and curses be broken.





Nkulumane Assembly



## *Chapter 10*

# **Attempts to Unite the Church: Tensions Ensur**

### **Political Differences Spill Over to the Church**

Reverend Bhengu's desire, after he had established the Assemblies of God in Highfield, was to see that and what Reverend Mkwanazi had established in Bulawayo and other regions come under one authority. He wanted a united church throughout Zimbabwe. His wish had been that Reverend Mkwanazi touch base with the likes of Kayinga who was in Harare. Zimbabwe had attained independence following the Lancaster House Constitutional Talks held in London. The two liberation movements ZAPU, then called Patriotic Front-ZAPU, and ZANU-Patriotic Front failed to fight the elections in February 1980 as a single body, as had been the wish of Josiah Magama Tongogara. In other words, a golden opportunity was lost to close ranks following the Special Branch manoeuvred split within the nationalist movement in 1963. The tragedy of the failure to present a united front was exacerbated by the fact that the following of the two parties was ethnic based. During the period following independence, there were clashes between the guerillas of the two movements. Following the discovery of arms caches on ZAPU properties, the ZAPU members in the government of Prime Minister Robert Mugabe were expelled from government and some of them were imprisoned on charges

of conspiring to topple a legitimately elected government. There was tension within the newly created Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) and many former ZIPRA combatants deserted. The South African government took advantage of the situation and added fuel to a politically volatile situation. They were well aware of the historical animosity and rivalry between the two parties. They aggravated the situation using white members within the security and intelligence apparatus who then became double agents, working both for the Zimbabwean State and the South African government.

Dissidents, both genuine and South African created, financed and directed, came on the scene. This presented the government with an opportunity to settle old scores with the Ndebele who used to raid the Shona during the heyday of the Ndebele State. A crack brigade, the Fifth Brigade, reporting directly to the Prime Minister, was created and sent on a mission code named Gukurahundi to counter the dissident menace, but also to achieve the political objective of removing political opposition and thus to create a one party state. The rural areas were the worst affected. Curfews were imposed and the army went on a campaign that did not seek to differentiate between dissidents and ordinary Ndebele speaking civilians. The security situation was untenable. The effect of the coming to power of the Shona supported ZANU-PF had the effect of damaging inter-ethnic relations. Initially, it was the security situation in the rural areas of Matabeleland and parts of the Midlands that would apply the brake to the Assemblies of God's drive for more members. The pastors from Bulawayo could no longer venture out to preach to the rural folk. Some of the rural people had fled the rural areas to seek refuge in Bulawayo and

other towns where relative peace prevailed. On the other front, the failure to unite the two liberation movements, created animosity between the two ethnic groups. When the Reverend and Mrs Mkwanazi went to live in Mufakose in Harare in an effort to unite the Assemblies of God in Zimbabwe they came face to face with this ethnic animosity. To some of their church members the fact that PF-ZAPU had lost elections was translated as meaning the Ndebele and the party that they supported had become second-rate. How could an Ndebele like Reverend Mkwanazi be expected to lead a national organization? It was the resulting strife, of course driven by other factors, that prompted the Reverend Bhengu to obtain a scholarship for Reverend Mkwanazi to go to the United States to undertake further studies so that he would be better placed to lead and seek to unite a fractious organization. It took the Reverend Bhengu himself to quell the strife. It seemed as though the truce would hold. Indeed, it did, as long as the Reverend Bhengu lived. It was a totally different story when the Reverend Bhengu died in 1985.

### **Reverend Mkwanazi Goes to Harare**

It was time for the couple to pack their bags and go to Harare to unite the church that Reverend Bhengu had established there with the one that Reverend Mkwanazi had set up in Matabeleland. The children were still young so the move did not present any problems with their schooling. A lot had happened since the time of Reverend Bhengu. Political schisms had taken place leading to Reverend Guti leaving to form his own organization.

There had been schisms within the nationalist movement. The war of liberation was intensifying. ZAPU had re-organised following

the split in 1971. Under Jason Ziyapapa Moyo, the liberation movement was better focused with Alfred Nikita Mangena in charge of the military outfit. Meanwhile, ZANU escalated the war by forging an alliance with Mozambique's liberation movement, Frelimo. The two launched attacks from the Tete Province.

Geoffrey's move to Salisbury was not readily welcomed. Reverend Bhengu had initially brought his Zulu kinsmen to be in charge, amongst them the Reverend Albert Gumede. The project did not succeed. Twelve years on, Reverend Mkwanazi went to Salisbury to take charge. He and his family lived with Reverend Maeresera in Mufakose. He used to visit assemblies in Highfield where the church building was still a metal frame. He also visited assemblies at Kambuzuma and Gillingham. There had been language challenges at the time when Zulu speaking pastors were in charge in Highfield. The situation did not improve when Reverend Mkwanazi succeeded them. He was not fluent in Shona, nor was his wife Eleanor. Geoffrey communicated in English, Ndebele and some rudimentary Shona. Eleanor, who showed a keen interest in languages, spoke in English and some Shona. "When people see you are trying to speak in their language they appreciate it very much," said Eleanor about the challenge they faced at the time. There were instances when she made mistakes and was advised not to try anymore. "*Mai Mkwanazi, chiregerai kutaura Shona!*" Please Mrs Mkwanazi, do not bother speaking in Shona. When she used an inappropriate word, members of the assembly sank their heads and covered their eyes in embarrassment. There came a time when Geoffrey's family had to return to Bulawayo, leaving him alone in Highfield. He moved from Mufakose to live in Highfield where the first assembly was established by the Reverend Bhengu in 1959. He



rented a house belonging to a Mr Gumedede. Geoffrey worked closely with Harare-based pastors such as Reverends J Kainga, Chiundiza and Nyamhanza.

The first source of opposition in Harare was from the black worshippers. It was an old female member of the assembly who expressed ethnic sentiments that ultimately led to the departure of Reverend Mkwanazi from Highfield. “When it is cold, you may put a Ndebele child in your (warm) pocket. (But) When he gets warm, he will bite you. A snake is a snake,” she said. At one time during a crusade at Chinhoyi, Eleanor asked Oliver Chidawu, “Tell me, Baba, is there a sin, *chivi*, which he (Geoffrey) has committed?” The response came and was ethnic poison. “For us to say our leader is an Ndebele is very difficult.” “Just that, *chete chete* (only that),” enquired Eleanor, somewhat puzzled. She recalled one sermon by the Reverend Bhengu concerning such racial and ethnic issues. “When a doctor gives you medicine, is the colour of the bottle important? Isn’t it the medicine that is important? Why bother about colour, what really matters is what a person can deliver to you,” said Reverend Bhengu. Reverend Mkwanazi commuted between Salisbury and Bulawayo. After the Sunday service he drove back to Bulawayo. One day after the service he was preparing to go back as usual. A member of the assembly approached him and said, “It’s late in the day. Why not postpone your trip to Bulawayo and undertake it tomorrow?” Geoffrey heeded the man’s advice and stayed overnight. After breakfast the man called Reverend Mkwanazi aside and said to him, “There was a plan to eliminate you. You were not going to get to Hartley (Now Chegutu). Some boys were lying in wait for you with the intention to harm you.”

There were different views from the white assemblies in Salisbury. Their perception of Reverend Mkwanazi taking charge of the Salisbury assemblies was that he was imposed on them by Reverend Bhengu. Reverend Mkwanazi was seen as Reverend Bhengu's successor who wished to maintain tight control over the Assemblies of God in Rhodesia. They argued that not all spiritual power was vested in one Apostle. Each region should have its own Apostle. They even made reference to the Bible and pointed out that Apostle Paul was not the only Apostle. Members of the Highfield assembly did not share the same perceptions. For them it was the ethnic factor that counted. Couldn't they have their own son taking charge instead of importing an Ndebele man from Matabeleland? The two arguments coincided. Reverend Mkwanazi was not welcome and he packed his bags and returned to Matabeleland in 1973. Meanwhile, the Reverend Bhengu was travelling to America and decided to pass through Rhodesia. Reverend Mkwanazi, who was then driving a *Citroen*, went up to Salisbury to meet him. It was then that Reverend Bhengu discovered that Reverend Mkwanazi had been expelled from Mashonaland. The two drove together to Gwelo and Bulawayo, and Bhengu visited the various projects under way. It was during this visit that a revival was organized in Bulawayo's Stanley Square in Makokoba. Stanley Square and its adjacent hall (built in 1936) were named after the Governor of Southern Rhodesia, Sir Herbert Stanley. It was a venue famous for cultural activities such as song and dance competitions in Bulawayo. It also hosted boxing matches and the screening of bioscope films. There was also a library housed within the premises. Trade union meetings took place on Stanley Square, as did quasi-political meetings such as

those of the Southern Rhodesia Bantu Voters Association (SRBVA). When the nationalist movement came into being their meetings also took place on Stanley Square. At the time Stanley Hall was the only hall available for use by the blacks in Makokoba. Later, MacDonald Hall in the new township of Mzilikazi was built and shared some functions with Stanley Square and Hall. Both historic halls have been declared national monuments by the Department of National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ).

Stanley Hall was the prime venue booked for the famous Reverend Bhengu. The invitations were sent to all congregations in Bulawayo. The flamboyant Reverend Sengwayo of the Apostolic Faith Mission attended the meeting. He came along with his pastors. It was a memorable service that won some converts for the Lord. Amongst the converts were Nyovane and Gulubane. Also present was Vina Moyo, a nursing sister at Mpilo Hospital who belonged to the Methodist Church. On two evenings Reverend Bhengu conducted services at S Square in Mzilikazi Township. During his visit he saw for himself the work that was being undertaken in Rhodesia. He promised to come back and pitch tents in Salisbury, Gwelo and Bulawayo. Indeed, the tents were pitched, although Gwelo was not included in the revival campaign. The tent in Bulawayo was pitched next to Njube Hall in Njube Township. The second revival was held the following year, 1974. The reason for choosing the site was that the toilets were close by. In Salisbury the tent was erected on Plantation Square. Pastors F V Shabalala, P Msiza and Baba Qhina came to work in Bulawayo. Miss Tomato came to work with the youth, while Bafo did some work with the women. There was also Maud Cele who worked with the young

both in Salisbury and Bulawayo. Tent revivals usually led to several conversions and that required a staff to consolidate the work. It was against this background that Reverend Bhengu sent his staff to both Harare and Bulawayo to strengthen the work achieved. In order to match the sudden growth following the introduction of personnel from South Africa more deacons were appointed, as were trustees to deal with the money side of the phenomenal growth. The trustees were responsible for banking the money. The tent revival meeting at Njube led to the establishment of an assembly and the consolidation of work at Njube. A church building was built, though not as big as uGinyazonke, the colossal church building constructed by Reverend Bhengu in East London. It could however sit up to one thousand worshippers. Ronnie Dlamini, a clothing factory supervisor and later a pastor in Gweru, was converted at this time alongside Dominic Mkhosi, Baba Nleya and MaNgwenya.

New blood was infused into the church following this heightened evangelization. This was the time when the likes of Silas Dube, Maqeda Ngwenya and a number of girls came into the fold. Cuthbert Chidoori, Mathamsanqa Dube and Sam Maphosa, among others had come on board much earlier, together with people such as Tshingane Ndlovu, Jimmy Ndlovu, Mrs Margaret Mhlanga and Durajadi Simba. Reverend Bhengu was then building on the work that Reverend Mkwanazi had initiated. Be that as it may, Reverend Bhengu effected greater control over the mission work in Zimbabwe. There was some semblance of unity at the time, albeit unilaterally imposed unity that could not hold in the absence of Reverend Bhengu. Through his countrymen and women he exerted control over the church in Zimbabwe. The net result was

that the personnel in Zimbabwe were denied critical learning to enable them to stand on their own when Reverend Bhengu finally left the scene, having been recalled to be in the presence of the Almighty in 1985. Reverend Bhengu wanted to, and did, control the finances of the Zimbabwean church. He was the chief trustee and signatory for all church bank accounts, despite being so far away from the field of operation. He signed some blank cheques to facilitate withdrawals while he was away. He meticulously checked all expenditure items. Reverend Bhengu injected funds from South Africa to help the pastors. As the saying goes 'he who pays the piper calls the tune', his control of finances was another way of having influence over the Assemblies of God in Zimbabwe. At one time he decreed that local resources be frozen so that they accumulate and church activities were sponsored by cash injections from South Africa. There was therefore administrative, structural, personnel and financial control over the church by the Reverend Bhengu. It does not appear that all the moves and measures that he took involved consultation. Such unilateral and undemocratic procedures were bound to incubate ill-feeling and animosity. As founder of the Back To God Crusade, he was silently tolerated.

### **Competition Becomes Unhealthy**

Mashonaland and Matabeleland were at the time loosely connected. Reverend Mkwanzazi no longer went to Salisbury. His work ended in Gwelo. At the same time Reverend Bhengu no longer came as frequently as he used to and the pastors who Reverend Bhengu had brought to Rhodesia returned to South Africa. Cele, Tomato and others returned, leaving Pastor Nkomo behind. The vacuum that their departure created was filled by the young organisers who were given the chance to preach and raise

funds. The women, who were heavily involved in fund-raising, organised services on Thursdays for their weekly meetings. Their quarterly meetings were held on Saturdays/Sundays to raise funds from their handiwork. Some sold tomatoes while others undertook cross border trips to Botswana to trade. Proceeds from their activities were used to fund church business. Meanwhile, Bafo had been moved to Mashonaland. Annually, the regions met in Gwelo, where the fund-raising efforts of the various regions were compared. A floating trophy had been inaugurated and that heightened the competition and the rivalry. One year Mashonaland won the coveted trophy. There were allegations, emanating from the Bulawayo delegates, that Pastor Shabalala had assisted the Mashonaland region. The challenge seems to have intensified when the two groups of delegates teased each other. At one point Pastor Shabalala is said to have uttered words bordering on vulgarity, which did not help relations between the two rival regions, “Today you will see the faeces of a snake that goes up a tree when it has no feet.” Pastor Shabalala uttered the words in Zulu, which is akin to SiNdebele spoken in Matabeleland. Delegates from Matabeleland felt terribly insulted, especially amid the allegations that Bafo, a Xhosa woman, had contributed her personal money to assure the triumph of the Mashonaland region. To make matters worse, the regions were not perceived as mere geographical locations but the rivalry took on an ethnic character. The rivalry pitted the Shona from Mashonaland against the Ndebele from Matabeleland. That both Pastor Shabalala and Bafo were from South Africa and Zulu and Xhosa respectively, was downplayed.

It took the intervention of Reverend Bhengu to quell the strife and misunderstanding. That in itself was a weakness as there was over

reliance on Reverend Bhengu in more ways than one. There were no conflict resolution mechanisms in place to which aggrieved persons could have recourse. It was Matabeleland that sought Reverend Bhengu's intervention. The shield was inscribed with the name of the winning region – so it was either Matabeleland or Mashonaland that was written on the trophy. A meeting was called at the Lutheran Church building in Tshabalala Township – opposite Elangeni Beer Garden. Reverend Bhengu, Bafo and Pastor Shabalala were present. Bafo was quizzed on the allegation that the Mashonaland coffers had been boosted. The Reverend Bhengu found Bafo not guilty. Pastor Shabalala, on the other hand, was admonished for uttering the snake affront. He was instructed to apologise. Then Reverend Bhengu turned to Reverend Mkwanzazi, “These people are here to help you. They are my representatives. You should appreciate that I am not always here. If you do not respect them, you do not respect me.” All involved heeded the advice and admonition. Unfortunately the ethnic perceptions persisted. “Ndebele men did not readily accept the word of God,” explained Reverend Mkwanzazi. The numerical superiority of the Shona men over Ndebele men was not appreciated. Even if more Ndebele men converted to the Assemblies of God, the Shona were always going to be greater in number. In the final analysis, this would translate to greater contributions by Mashonaland than Matabeleland.

### **Reverend Mkwanzazi Goes to the United States**

Reverend Bhengu had seen the toll that the strife was taking on the Reverend Mkwanzazi. Furthermore, Reverend Bhengu had seen for himself the good work being done in Matabeleland. It was his desire to enhance Geoffrey's capacity to handle the work at hand

through further education. It would appear the Reverend Bhengu was already preparing the anointment of Reverend Mkwanazi following his (Bhengu's) demise. If not, at least that is how Reverend Mkwanazi took and understood it. Anointing a successor instead of following laid down bureaucratic arrangements becomes a source of friction when the anointed successor, without the messianic aura of a founder, faces stiff opposition. The situation is further exacerbated where the new generation has higher formal educational qualifications and sound grounding in principles of professional leadership and management. Spiritual succession lends itself to crises and strife. Later Reverend Shabalala would also be sent by Reverend Bhengu to the same college in the United States.

Reverend Bhengu had access to scholarships in America. In order to take care of 'eventualities', by which he obviously meant his own demise, Reverend Bhengu chose Reverend Mkwanazi for a scholarship to advance his educational status. Reverend Bhengu had the vision to see the need for capacity building to attain effective leadership of a burgeoning organization like the Assemblies of God. As founder, he had abrogated unto himself the spiritual right to anoint his successor. The strategy backfired with disastrous consequences for the Assemblies of God in the period following his death in 1985.

### **Becoming a Student Once Again**

After a student visa was obtained in South Africa, Geoffrey and Eleanor boarded a Lufthansa flight en route to the Congo (now the Democratic Republic of Congo). When they boarded the flight in Johannesburg they had been told about the presence of pickpockets



and advised to be on the look out. From the Congo the flight took them to Brussels in Belgium. They caught another flight the next morning that took them to New York. Another connection took them to Dallas in Texas. Geoffrey and Eleanor, as husband and wife, were housed in their own apartment. The students at the institution paid for their tuition and accommodation by taking up temporary jobs in town. This was however restricted to the citizens of the United States. Eleanor and Geoffrey, being foreigners, paid their fees by cleaning class-rooms, college premises and toilets. Every Tuesday there were inspections of the facilities that they cleaned. The Americans were pleasantly surprised at the standard of personal hygiene of Eleanor and Geoffrey. At the institution some students from Rhodesia had body odour. One student in particular smelt so badly that the Mkwanazis were asked to approach him. They spoke to the student and offered to buy some deodorant for him.

At the institution were Afrikaners from South Africa who had to learn to mix with students across the colour bar. They were in the same hall as Reverend Shabalala their compatriot. They were on lower bunks while Reverend Shabalala was on an upper one. Most nations were represented within the student body.

The Mkwanazis were given credits by the institution for their two years at Spring Valley Bible School in Witbank and the one year in Sweden. Lessons from the Old Testament included the idea of possessing the land. The lesson included forgiveness and the realization that one can't pray when one is not free from the past. One must release oneself in order to attain salvation. Church history and the New Testament were other subjects that were

taught. They also had teachings on Praise, Worship and Intercession. The last two subjects were new to both of them, as they had not been offered at Witbank. Geoffrey began to interrogate his conscience, “Should I or should I not go back to Rhodesia? The Shona hate me.” This state of indecision was short-lived. The call from God came, “Go back and unite them. That can be done through forgiveness and praying.”

The daily routine at the institution was for the students to gather each morning in the hall. Once a week, a guest speaker came to address them for a one hour period. With that ritual concluded, the students went back to their classrooms. The lessons then commenced. After the lessons, the local students went to work in factories and business concerns such as McDonalds to earn money for their fees. The evenings were devoted to study in the classrooms. It was also the time for homework and assignments. Over the weekends the students were allocated to local churches such as Four Square Church in Dallas City. Some students served as ushers while others engaged in singing. Reports were written on the performance of the students. These were sent to the institution and contributed to the students’ final marks. After the services Eleanor and Geoffrey were often invited for lunch by a family. Sunday evening was devoted to a service for all the various churches. The same guest speaker from the previous week conducted the service. The Sunday service marked the end of the guest’s stay and another person would come for the next week.

For Eleanor and Geoffrey the weekends provided them with an opportunity to spend precious time with other families. There was an Afro-American family that adopted them and they used to go to

their home. This particular family ran the Crusade Workshop for Christ. On their visits they had the chance to braai.

### **Establishing Critical Synergies**

The time came for the graduation, which was a splendid ceremony. For them the stay at the institution lasted only one year because of the credits that they had been granted due to their previous studies. Eleanor and Geoffrey did not immediately pack their bags and return to Africa. They seized the opportunity to travel and see places of interest. They went to Tulsa, Oklahoma, where they had the rare privilege to visit the Oral Roberts University. Dr Oral Roberts (24 January 1918 to 15 December 2009) was an American evangelist and Christian charismatic. He founded the Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association and the Oral Roberts University. He became famous for his healing mission and pioneered televangelism. He laid the foundations of the prosperity gospel and abundant life teachings. His television programme was titled, “Something Good Is Going to Happen to You”.

They also visited the T L Osborne Museum, which houses artefacts from African countries. In Chicago they went up the tallest building to get a panoramic view of the sprawling city.

Reverend Bhengu ran an office in Virginia. When Eleanor and Geoffrey got there they organized meetings to fund-raise for the Assemblies of God. They had also been instructed to collect some money from the office. In Roanoke City they met Pastor Jimmy Hollandsworth who promised them that his congregation would contribute to their church once they were back in Africa. Pastor Hollandsworth did keep in touch and on one occasion he visited

them when there was a conference in Gweru. He even paid a visit to the assembly at Sukwe in Gwanda. At the time of the pastor's visit in 1981, the Mkwanazi family was living in Burnside in a house belonging to Dr Jolly Mkwanazi. Pastor Hollandsworth assisted the family with funds with which they bought a house at 111 Matopos Road, Famona. Pastor Hollandsworth now lives in an old people's home.

During their stay in America Geoffrey fell ill. He suffered from serious headaches. On seeing a specialist he was diagnosed with high blood pressure and prescribed one Lisinopril tablet a day, which he still takes. The tablets are manufactured for Lupin Pharmaceuticals, Inc. in Baltimore, Maryland by Lupin Limited in Goa, India. Nancy Myres, an Assistant Principal at Oak Grove Elementary School in Roanoke, sends the tablets via South Africa. The Mkwanazis' daughter in South Africa, Nops, receives them and sends them on to her father. On one occasion when Nancy sent them straight to Zimbabwe the tablets were impounded by customs and it took the good offices of Dr Zulu Mahlangu, a medical practitioner at Mpilo Hospital, to get the tablets cleared. Nancy's husband, Jimmy Myers, who worked for an airline, assisted Eleanor and Geoffrey by helping them to organize bookings in expensive hotels. The Myres became close friends of the Mkwanazis and continue to pray for the Zimbabwean couple and their work in Zimbabwe. The American couple used to send money to Eleanor and Geoffrey but no longer do so. Another medical problem that Geoffrey experienced was with his urinary tract. Mr Mwanawamba, a surgeon at Mpilo, rectified this problem.

### **Squabbling over Donations**

Eleanor and Geoffrey visited several congregations in the States to tell them about the Assemblies of God. Donations were made by the congregations and the money collected was sent to Zimbabwe, specifically to Harare. This was the situation when the Reverend Bhengu was still alive. They regarded him as the overall leader of the Back To God Crusade and, at the time, Harare was recognized as the centre for the Zimbabwean work. The fact that funds were sent to Harare is testimony to that reality. When Reverend Bhengu died the situation changed. There is a lot to learn from the procedures followed after his death. Once Reverend Bhengu died the donors ceased sending money to Harare. They “knew (Reverend) Mkwanazi to be the Director,” said Geoffrey. If Harare was the recognized centre for the Assemblies of God, how did the death of Reverend Bhengu change that position in terms of arrival point for overseas donations? Besides, Reverend Bhengu lived in South Africa and his preferred successor was closer to Harare than the Reverend Bhengu. Clearly, the move was bound to cause friction within the church, and indeed it did.

The money issue was contentious. Some South African whites wrote letters to the donors indicating that Geoffrey was no longer with Back To God. But the donors in Virginia insisted that Reverend Bhengu had told them Reverend Mkwanazi would be the contact person after his death. They thus ignored the intimations from the white South African members of the Assemblies of God. Oliver Chidawu, Chairman of Organizers, wrote on 4 March 1986, on behalf of the Back To God office in Harare, to Reverend Mkwanazi expressing concern over the money issue.

### Back To God USA

“I have noticed of recent that most of the correspondences from Christian Aid are now all copied to you; especially those to Back To God Harare office, even cheques seem now to be directed to you than to the offices as before. Could you explain to us what should be the exact position? I would have thought if copies by Back To God to Regional offices were necessary then the letter should be directed to respective offices, but since 1979 when we opened BTG “USA” we had never handled things this way. I would not know now whether I should continue in giving reports, accounting for cheques sent to us and sending pictures they have always wanted. I would appreciate your early response so that before I leave for New York, we would be in a clear position as to what the position is. I leave on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 1986.”

Strife within the Assemblies of God caught the attention of the print media. The Bulawayo based *Chronicle* carried a front page story with a screaming headline, ‘DISPUTE ROCKS CHURCH’. There was an accompanying picture of the Reverend Mkwanzazi. The story, carried by the issue of 11 July 1987, highlighted the existence of strife within the church.

“A row has erupted in the Assemblies of God Church between some church members and the leadership. The disgruntled rival members have accused the leader Rev Geoffrey Mkwanzazi, of hypocrisy, violence, dictatorship and failing to account for church funds.

“The Chronicle spoke to Reverend Mkwanzazi who sat with other reverends and pastors. He said the trouble in the church started in

1985 when the founder, Rev Nicholas Bhengu, died.” In Reverend Mkwanazi’s view the strife was related to the struggle for the control of church property and money. The allegation of violence arose from Rustin Moyo’s beating up of a youth. He was charged with public fighting and fined S10.00. It was these events that led to the changing of locks on the church doors. Locksmiths were engaged to change the locks in a continuing saga over the control of keys.”

It is clear that the issues surrounding Reverend Bhengu were central to the strife that ensued following his death. His being founder of the Back To God Crusade gave him untrammelled powers that overrode the bureaucratic powers inherent within the lawful structures of the church. His personal dealings led to less than transparent dealings, some of which, to all intents and purposes, amounted to personal wealth building. When Geoffrey professed ignorance as to the sources of Reverend Bhengu’s income, he correctly pointed to a serious issue that was covered with the shroud of spirituality, charisma and the unassailable aura of being founder. The fact of apartheid with its parallel structures meant the white members were kept at bay, leaving Reverend Bhengu to become a ‘loose spiritual canon’. While Reverend Bhengu could get away with undemocratic procedures, his preferred successor faced stiff opposition, in particular from the younger members of the church. Not only did opposition to him come from those who were young, there was also a professional class that believed in principles of professional administration which reposes power in an institution with its hierarchies, rather than in an individual.

The absence of a strong bureaucratic structure predisposes an institution to succession crises. The issue is compounded by traditional African ideas on succession. A church founded by an individual is seen as an asset that should be subjected to the African traditional laws of inheritance. In African patriarchal societies the eldest son, specific qualifications notwithstanding, inherits the property. That is the law of primogeniture. Following the demise of the founder and leader, there are instances where the son has taken over. The Zion Christian Church (ZCC) is a good example. Where there is no son but a daughter, sometimes the husband of a daughter is groomed to take over. This happens where patriarchy still has a hold. In both instances what is critical are the machinations resorted to in order to keep wealth within the family of the founder. A preferred successor, by virtue of having been a close ally and confidante of the founder, is predisposed to safeguard and protect the welfare and interests of the late founder. The spirit-based churches such as the Zionists and other African Initiated Churches (AIC) are prone to this phenomenon, which has trappings of African traditional ideas regarding inheritance. It is all politics of accumulation within the context of spirituality or spiritual politics of accumulation.

When the time came for Eleanor and Geoffrey to leave America, they initially flew to Sweden where they renewed old friendships. The benevolent lady who had given them money for air tickets the last time they were in Sweden had died and her son-in-law took them to her grave. It was an emotional experience for the couple. The weather was wintry on the day of their flight back home. They flew via London and landed in Harare from where they took the flight to Bulawayo, their final destination.



# Isililo ngoBhengu sizwakele naphesheya

GUY VEZI

**FHEKWINI.** — Umshikashika wokuhlwanyela iVangeli likaNkulunkulu kulomhlaba, ulahlekelwe ngomunye wezihlabani nezingqalabutho ebesezizakhele udumo nokuhlonipheka emazweni amaningi kuleli naphesheya kwezilwandle.

Lesihlabani, kumbe leliqhawe kwezeVangeli, nguMfu. Nicholas B.H. Bhengu owasungula umkhankaso wokuhlwanyela iVangeli likaNkulunkulu kwiwa ngokuthi yiBack To God Crusade.

Indlela izinkonzo ebezihambe zenziwa nguMfu. Bhengu ematendeni, ngesikhulu isivini lesi, zaba nesasasa ne mpumelelo kangangoba iBack To God Crusade isidume ngokuthi yisonto lakwaBhengu.

Kodwa obekuhamba phambili ezinkonzweni zakhe, nokuyikhona abeha ngakho kakhulu intsha yindlela umculo oculwa ezinkonzweni zakhe ophapheme ngayo.

Kunesisho sesizulu esithi: "umfundisi kamzali umfundisi". Kepha kwaNgcolosi akusebenzanga lokho. Uyise wayengumfundisi naye eBandieni laseLuthela esebenzela eShowe, lapho azalwa khona uMfu. Nicholas Bhengu ngo-September ngonyaka ka-

1909, endaweni yaseNtumeni.

Yilapho aqala khona ukufunda esikoleni. Ekukhuleni kwakhe izimpawu zokuthi ubizelwe emsebenzini weNkosi, zahlala obala kangangoba kuthe ngo-1936 eseneminyaka engu-27 ubudala, wagcotshelwa ubufundisi ebandieni i-Assemblies of God. Waqala ukusebenza ngokuphelele ePort Elizabeth ngo-1945.

Abefundisi balelibandla abakhulume nale ngomsebenzi kaMfu. Bhengu bathe umfutho kaMfu. Bhengu waqala ukubonakala ngalesosikhathi. Bathe wayephuma ayoshumayela, ephendula abantu ebasondeza kuNkulunkulu, ephiwe namandla okuphilisa abagulayo, ephendula ngisho nezigebenye ezasesatshiswa okwenyoka. Ngendlela isibalo sabantu abazinikela ebandieni ngayo, kwaze kwadingeka ukuba asungule enye ingalo ye-Assemblies of God

yokuphuma aye ezweni ayoshumayela aphen-dule abantu eyabizwa ngokuthi yiBack To God Crusade.

Ngo-1949 uMfu. Bhengu wahamba wayoqhuba izifundo zakhe kwezeVangeli eMelika eTaylor University e-Indiana. Ekuphuthuleni kwakhe lezofundo wahambela amazwe amaningi edabula iNorth America, Europe kanye namazwe aseFar East.

UMfu. Bhengu uzakhele udumo ngemisebenzi yakhe, elinye lamaphephabhuku aphe-sheya elihlonishwa kakhulu, iTime Magazine, emva kokulandela izinkonzo zakhe ayezenza phezuya nophumela yazo, lambiza ngokuthi ungu'Billy Graham wase-Africa.' Limfanisa noMfundisi waseMelika odume umhlaba wonke ngezimvuselelo uBilly Graham ovutha uphondo kwezeVangeli.

Kanti elinye lamaphephandaba aseScotland, lapho uMfu. Bhengu ayeshumayeza khona izitshudeni zaseGlasgow University, ngesikhathi izwe laseScotland lithumele uDavid Livingstone kuleli lase-Africa, laphuma nodaba olwalunesihloko esithi: "Isco-tland ithumele uDavid Livingstone e-Africa.



UMFU. Nicholas Bhengu obedume ngezinkonzo ezenzelwa ematendeni ezibizwa ngokuthi yiBack To God Crusade.

I-Africa ithumela uNicholas Bhengu eScotland."

Kuze kwafika isikhathi sokuthi abizelwe kweliphezulu uMfu. Bhengu esenamandla amangalisayo. Ubengavumelani neminyaka yakhe yobudala. Eminyakeni edule wathi ngaphambi kokwethula intshumayelo yakhe phambi kwezihlele; "Noma sengikhule ngaze ngafika eminyakeni yawo '70, ngizirwa ngimusha zonke izinsuku. Ngizirwa ngimusha ngisho ngaphansi kwento engangiyiyo eminyakeni engu-60 eyedule.

Uzongcwatswa emathuneni aseSinathingi ngomGqibelo wona lo wakusasa. Kuzoba ne-

nkonzo eSt. Peter's Cathedral edolobheni laseMgungundlovu ekuseni ngo-9 kuya ku-10. Kuzosukwa lapho kuyiwe eJan Smuts Stadium kuze kube ngu-2 ntambama. Emva kwalokho kobe sekugondwa emathuneni aseSinathingi.

Kanti kusasa kusukela ngo-11 ekuseni kuze kube ngu-2 ntambama, kuzoba nenkonzo yokumhumbulula esontweni laseWeseli, iDurban Central Methodist Church esekhoneni likaSmith no-Aliwal Street eThukwini.

Umfundisi Bhengu ushiye umkakhe uNkk. Nokwethemba Bhengu, namadodakazi amabili nendodana eyodwa.

## THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD — BACK TO GOD CHURCH

The Assemblies of God — Back to God Church Organisation would like to refute in strongest terms the false allegations put by the strange Mike Sibanda who is not the member of our church. The allegations on church disputes appeared in The Chronicle on July 11th, 1987. We do not have anyone like "Mike Sibanda" in all our assemblies in Bulawayo. If he exists, he should identify himself, or he is just possibly a "hired agent" to smear the leadership and the church.

Delay for refuting is regretted.

e253948/S

# Chronicle

NO. SATURDAY, JULY 11, 1987 X

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# Dispute rocks church

**A ROW has erupted in the Assemblies of God Church between some church members and the leadership.**

The disgruntled rival members have accused the leader, Rev Geoffrey Mkwanzani, of hypocrisy, violence, dictatorship and failing to account for church funds.

The Chronicle spoke to Rev Mkwanzani who sat with other reverends and pastors. He said the trouble in the church started in 1985 when the founder, Rev Nicholas Biengu, died.

"Soon after that people were after the church's property and money," he said.

Spokesman for the rival Mike Sibanda, Mkwanzani of the did not

**Chronicle Reporter**

that country, said Rev Mkwanzani.

When Rev Pshobata returned in 1986, he said there were other, bigger issues to be looked into, so the money matter was overlooked.

"Nothing has been said about the money since then and nobody from the church approached me about the matter until today."

On the accusations of assaulting one church member, the pastor, Austin Moyo, said he had only been disciplining the youth for blocking the church's keyholes with tripepon.

"I never assaulted him, I only grabbed him by the collar and because I have long nails, he was scratched on the neck," said Pastor Moyo.



Rev Mkwanzani

Pastor Moyo said he was charged with public fighting and fined \$10.

Rev Mkwanzani denied that the church at Ntshu was locked but admitted that the Tuesday and Thursday services were no longer being held.

"Too many people were in possession of keys resulting in a number of thefts. It was then decided that the church elder should be the only one to handle the keys. All Sunday services go on as usual," he said.

Rev Mkwanzani denied all the allegations that he and his supporters had threatened violence to the splinter group. He said the accusations were intended to smear the church's image.

He also said any church member could marry anyone as long as the person was a Christian.

## Gold dump in City backyard

**Chronicle Reporter**

A BULAWAYO resident has asked the Ministry of Mines for permission to exploit a gold dump in her backyard.

Cde Joyce Newenya of Norton West said last night an officer from the Ministry of Mines confirmed that the dump in her 12 ha yard had some gold samples have been taken for further examination she said.

Cde Newenya, a primary school teacher and whose husband is unemployed said the Bulawayo City Council had granted her family permission to exploit the dump.

## 20 hurt in crash

**HARARE** — Twenty people were injured, six of them seriously, when a locomotive collided with a bus at a level crossing in Kadoma yesterday.

ZBC reported that the injured were taken to Kadoma Hospital with the six in critical condition. Efforts to get a comment from the hospital last night were in vain. — OwnCorr

## Harare takes top prize

**Chronicle Reporter**

THE first prize in yesterday's State Lottery draw held at Bulawayo City Hall went to ticket number 283437 Campbell's Luck of Harare.

The \$15 000 second prize went to 012855 11th And Post Synd of Mutare, and 066591 Chapikiri of Mashava, won the \$7 000 third prize.

Full results on centre spread.

THE CHAIRMAN,  
ASSEMBLIES OF GOD NATIONAL EXECUTIVE,  
P.O. Box 110,  
BULAWAYO.

14<sup>TH</sup> January 1986

Dear Brother Mkwanazi,  
Greetings - In Jesus' name! I trust  
that 1987 will be a good year for you.

I enclose the letter that I received from Hwange  
that I mentioned to you. I apologise that I have not  
sent it sooner. I have only just replied to them to  
advise them of our changed situation.

With reference to my last letter to you and the  
withdrawal of the Chipinge A.O.G. from the fellowship I have the  
following to advise:

- (a) The Chipinge Assembly will be withdrawing from the A.O.G.
- (b) The meeting to withdraw will take place on Wednesday  
March 18<sup>TH</sup> at 7:00 pm. We request you or a member of the  
Executive to be present at that meeting to satisfy the Constitutional  
requirement.

I look forward to hearing from you in due course  
with reference to these meetings.

May God continue to bless and use you and may  
He give you increased wisdom in the days that lie ahead.

Yours - in the name of Jesus.

A.B. Roberts

# GENERAL POWER OF ATTORNEY "J"

PROVINCIAL MAGISTRATE  
MATABELELAND  
14-08-1987  
P.O. Box 581  
BULAWAYO

CERTIFIED TRUE AND CORRECT COPY  
PROVINCIAL MAGISTRATE - MATABELELAND  
Date

Know all Men whom it may concern:

That I, NICHOLAS BHEKINKOSI HEPWORTH BHENGU  
(born 5th September, 1909)

Do hereby nominate and appoint

GEOFFREY BIZENI NKWANAZI (born 30th August, 1929)

to be my General Attorney and Agent for managing and transacting all my affairs, in  
Zimbabwe

with power to ask, demand, sue for recover and receive all debts or sums of money, goods, effects and things whatsoever, which now are, or may hereafter become, due or belonging to me: AND to settle and adjust accounts as he shall think fit and proper, and if necessary to compound for the same and accept a part for the whole: AND to settle and adjust any demand, and to pay any sum that may be due by me: AND to submit any matters in dispute to arbitration, and for that purpose to sign and execute the necessary acts and instruments in that behalf: AND to let and hire out houses, and grant leases for the term agreed upon, and to collect and receive the rents: AND to make, draw, accept, or endorse promissory notes or Bills of Exchange in satisfaction or on account of any debt due to or by me, and to operate on my banking account whether the same is in credit or otherwise: AND to buy and sell immovable or mining property, and for that purpose to make the necessary declaration as to the truth of the amount of purchase money, and to receive, or to make and give, as the case may be, the necessary acts and Deeds of Transfer of such landed or mining property in due and customary form according to the local laws and usages, to locate, peg, register or abandon mining claims or locations, either in my name, or in the name of any person whose rights I shall have acquired: AND to invest any moneys in his hands on mortgage of immovable or of mining property, and from time to time to alter or vary such investments should it be deemed necessary or expedient to do so: AND to take up money under security of my property, whether movable, immovable or mining, and to appear before any Registrar of Deeds, Notary Public or other competent authority, and to make and execute all such Mortgage Bonds, or other securities as may be requisite and necessary in that behalf under obligation of my person and property of every description: AND to transfer and accept transfer of shares, stock or debentures in any syndicate, public company or corporation: AND if necessary, for me and on my behalf to commence, prosecute, or to defend, any action, suit or other proceedings in or before any Court, or other body or person, and to suffer judgment or decree to be given against me in any such proceedings by default as to the said Attorney shall seem meet: AND further to give and grant receipts, releases, or other effectual discharges for any sum of money or things recovered or received on my behalf: AND to proof my claim in any insolvent estates or companies in liquidation: AND to sign and execute any deed or instrument in writing as effectually as I might or could do if personally present: AND to choose *domicilium citandi et executandi*: AND GENERALLY, to do, execute, and suffer every such other act, deed, matter or thing whatsoever, as the said Attorney may deem necessary or expedient in or about my concerns: AND I hereby substitute my said Attorney to act on my behalf under all Powers of Attorney which have hitherto or may hereafter be granted to me containing power of substitution, and to exercise all the powers thereby conferred upon me: hereby giving and granting to the said Attorney power to appoint a substitute or substitutes, and all such substitutes at pleasure to displace or remove, and appoint another or others, hereby ratifying, and agreeing to ratify, whatsoever shall be lawfully done or suffered by these presents.

*Handwritten initials and marks*

In Witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand at Bulawayo

this 10th day of December, in the year of our Lord, One Thousand  
Nine Hundred and Eighty-One, in the presence of the undersigned witnesses:

As Witnesses:

- 1. *[Signature]*
- 2. *[Signature]*

*[Signature of Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu]*

## *Chapter 11*

# **Church Faces Internal Strife**

A Mozambican, Shadreck Lekulu, started a nascent assembly in Highfield before the Reverend Bhengu set foot there in 1959. Lekulu, though a Mozambican, was fluent in Zulu and was acceptable to the Reverend Bhengu who had been invited by the Assemblies of God general council for Southern Rhodesia. Reverend Bhengu left Lekulu in charge of Assemblies of God work, together with Albert Gumede and Seko (Sikhu). The ethnic card was at play from the outset. Reverend Bhengu wanted to replace Lekulu with Reverend Gumede, his close ally from South Africa and a fellow Zulu. Lekulu resisted the move and pulled out of the Assemblies of God to form his own independent assembly. Meanwhile, the Americans had pulled out of the umbrella of the Assemblies of God that brought together missionaries from South Africa, America, England, Ireland and Sweden, including the Pentecostal Assemblies of God of Canada (PAGC). Lekulu teamed up with the Americans. Their new organization was called the International Assemblies of God. Schisms had already taken place that early in the history of the Assemblies of God in Rhodesia. What needs to be appreciated is that the Back To God Crusade of 1959 undercut white patronage of the black assemblies. The Crusade was premised on black independence and self-confidence, which was further strengthened by the political climate. The nationalist sentiments were strong. Ghana had led the way in 1957

by gaining independence from Britain. In 1960 there were political riots in Southern Rhodesia, particularly in Bulawayo. The old Ndebele war chant *Zhi-i* was revived and properties in the western suburbs were torched and looted.

This chapter will deal with schisms within the Assemblies of God in Zimbabwe. This was not something new. The group led by Reverend Guti's, the AFF, including Jeremiah Kainga, Misheck Chimusoro and D B Gara, were looked down upon as Johnny-come-latelies, *omafikizolo*. Those who join an organization late are sometimes marginalized. There are many factors that come to play in causing fissures within church organizations. Maxwell(2006) identifies some of these as generational tension, religious disputes, racism and ambition. We shall see when we look at the disputes that rocked the Assemblies of God whether these were the factors at play.

It is not the intention of this book to fan the flames of conflict. The aim is to draw attention to those conditions and factors that may lead to strife, which then retards the main objectives of the church. Such factors, be they institutional or individual, need to be brought to the fore so that they can be avoided in the future. It is also recognized that after the conflict there was reconciliation, which is still being nursed. What lessons about reconciliation can be drawn from the experiences? What are the challenges that must be faced in conflict resolution? It is these wider lessons that we seek to identify in order to reach generalizations that can be applied to other situations. Zimbabwe as a nation is in need of reconciliation. The creation of the Organ on National Healing and Reconciliation was formed with that in mind. The reconciliation within the

Assemblies of God, it is hoped, will provide some useful lessons for the Organ.

The narratives of the conflict, from both interviews and court proceedings, will be used to identify the factors that triggered the strife and conflict within the Assemblies of God. The discourses on reconciliation provide lessons that may be applied to other situations where strife and conflict are experienced. For that, we need to tap into the various voices within the conflict and its resolution. It is important that these voices do not come from one side of the conflict. There are at least two sides to a conflict and it takes those two sides to broker peace. We can now turn to the many voices of the conflict and the efforts that were expended to initiate reconciliation and healing.

Most importantly, this book is a biography of Reverend Mkwanazi and not a history of the Assemblies of God in Zimbabwe. There is little, for example, on the assemblies in areas such as Mutare where Reverend Mkwanazi did not serve. As the Reverend Mkwanazi served in the Assemblies of God, his biography inevitably impinges on the history of the Assemblies of God. The church provided the field on which Reverend Mkwanazi played.

### **Reconciliation Falters**

Eleanor and Geoffrey returned from America imbued with the spirit of reconciliation and forgiveness. “That was the gospel we brought with us,” recounted Geoffrey. A meeting was called in Gweru where delegates from Mashonaland would meet those from Matabeleland. The separation between the two groups was not in the open but simmered below the surface. The women’s fund-

raising competition, Mrs Bhengu observed, had taken ethnic-political dimensions. ZANU-PF had used the cockerel as its election symbol. Delegates from Harare imitated the cockerel when they danced. This was not viewed in a favourable light by the delegates from Bulawayo, who, in general, were PF-Zapu supporters. The Reverend Bhengu realized the need to defuse the situation. In March 1985 he called members of the church to a meeting in Kwekwe. Realizing that he was perceived as rebellious and the villain, Geoffrey duly apologized and requested to be relieved of his leadership duties.

Geoffrey temporarily left the Assemblies of God. He joined the New Life For All, another Pentecostal church run by Pastor Patson Netha together with David Broom of Harare. Kainga had not been sent to the United States despite his long service with the Assemblies of God and he felt discriminated against. When Reverend Mkwanazi was in the United States he worked with the missionaries who worked with Reverend Bhengu. A different group in the United States worked with Reverend Guti. Admittedly, the bulk of the church work was in Mashonaland. That anomaly still exists in terms of numbers of districts. There are two districts for Matabeleland while Mashonaland has one. There was no love lost between Reverend Bhengu and Kainga. The whites, who had never forgiven Reverend Bhengu for undercutting their patronising hold on black assemblies, stoked the fires in the hope of weakening the powerful Reverend Bhengu. The white assemblies used their financial muscle to create pockets of allegiance to themselves.



The Reverend Bhengu heard rumours that Reverend Mkwanazi was not happy and was planning to leave the church, and this is what led him to call the meeting in Kwekwe with a view to finding out just what was taking place in order to rectify the situation. At the Kwekwe meeting there were representatives of the National Executive from South Africa. Also present were all pastors, elders and deacons. At the meeting Reverend Mkwanazi said, “I feel you do not love me. You think I am competing for your leadership post. Accordingly, I want to quit all my leadership positions, in the Board, the Executive, and being the Representative of Reverend Bhengu in Matabeleland. After all, I have no administrative qualities.”

The Reverend Bhengu felt stung. “It is not true that I do not love you. The problem is that you do not consult me. I cannot remove you from the leadership posts. I can’t allow the youngsters to be leaders without a senior eye. I have no other persons in Zimbabwe who know the origins of this organization. Today I declare that the Zimbabwe work is one and shall be led by one person and that one person is (Reverend) Mkwanazi.” It sounded like a decree. More was to come from the founder. “Anyone who does not obey you should leave the church. If you (Reverend Mkwanazi) don’t take this instruction you might as well leave.” There was no objection to the instruction. He went on, “I want nothing that will interfere with Mkwanazi’s leadership. Unlike what the whites are doing (the schisms) this work (of the blacks) is one and shall be led by one person.” In his biography of the Reverend Mkwanazi, Pastor Obed W Masuku gives a fuller rendition of the speech by Reverend Bhengu.

“I leave the work of God in Zimbabwe under the leadership of Geoffrey Mkwanzazi. He is the only man I have trained and groomed. He is quite familiar with the movement of the Assemblies of God. We taught him everything in South Africa.

“Anyone who does not want to accept Reverend Mkwanzazi’s leadership should peacefully leave Assemblies of God here in Zimbabwe. Again, if Reverend Mkwanzazi does not want to take instructions from me and lead accordingly, he too must leave Assemblies of God.”

A note, simply titled Instructions: Matabeleland, was written by Reverend Bhengu on 21 May 1984 and had the following points:

1. Eunice Mkhosi to be discharged at the end of June.
2. In order to unify and consolidate the work in Matabeleland, somebody acceptable to all must be found to replace her.
3. Reverend G B Mkwanzazi’s signature must be on all banking accounts as chairman to relieve me from signing. I am doing this in all areas to make my work easier and lighter – I hereby appoint Rev G B Mkwanzazi as my representative in Matabeleland to sign on all accounts... (word unclear) but all assemblies to keep and operate their own accounts freely.
4. All assemblies to work together as one person with love and cooperation and respect Rev G B Mkwanzazi as my representative. Ministers to do the same in order to keep the work together as one.
5. Consult him in everything and if there is anything difficult he will consult me.

6. Arrange for the laying of the foundation stones at Njube and Gwanda when I should come up and lay them as well as opening of the churches. I have a long overseas trip.

There was no better way of sowing seeds of discontent. The commanding style did not augur well for a transparent, responsible and democratic leadership of the church after his departure. He had set the precedent of dictating to his charges. The instruction to discharge Eunice does not seem to have left room for a fair trial or hearing. At the stroke of one man's pen, she was to go. The signing arrangements were not a subject for discussion. It was imposition after imposition. There was certainly going to be opposition to his anointed successor, despite the mentoring, familiarity and grooming by himself. The idea of importing helpers from South Africa, now to be followed by a Reverend Bhengu hand picked successor, created in the minds of some church members, in particular the younger and better educated, a sense of superiority demonstrated by Reverend Bhengu for all those connected in one way or the other with South Africa. He did not seem to have learnt the lesson when his imposition of Reverend Albert Gumede and other South Africans backfired, culminating in the breakaway by Reverend Ezekiel Guti and the followers that he had brought into the Assemblies of God.

The advent of independence strained relations between church members who were loyal to antagonistic political parties. Those whites who were racist were not particularly keen to live under a black regime. There had been a number of whites who, well before independence, had patronized black worshippers and sometimes even attended multiracial conventions. Some of them even

belonged to the National Executive that was chaired by the Reverend Mkwanazi. Included in this category were people such as Neil Gibbs, Titham, Reverend John Stegman and Reverend Bill Mundell. After the unification of black and white work, Trevas van der Merwe became the first chairman of the Assemblies of God in Zimbabwe. Before then the various assemblies had been uncoordinated. There were individual missionary efforts that were not consolidated.

While the church was facing strife the white assemblies were voting to abandon the church. Of those whites who stayed in the country, some joined existing churches while others formed their own churches. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of November 1986 J E T Baker wrote to the chairman of the National Executive, Reverend Mkwanazi, advising him of their intention to withdraw from the Assemblies of God.

Dear Brother in Christ,

At a general meeting on the 5<sup>th</sup> of November 1986 the members of McChlery Avenue Assembly of God voted to give notice of their intention to withdraw from the Assemblies of God.

In accordance with the constitution a minimum period of three months must elapse and a special meeting has been called for 7pm on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> March 1987, at McChlery Avenue, when a final decision will be taken. It is requested that a member of the (National) executive be present at the meeting.

We continue to pray for a resolution of the problem within the Back To God Crusade and assure you of our love and respect.

The letter makes clear that there were problems within the Back To God Crusade, an organ to which the whites did not belong. That

was the organ that was created by Reverend Bhengu and within which he had unassailable power and influence. The whites were displeased with the squabbles that were going on. That was the final straw that broke the camel's back. One after the other, the white assemblies dissolved themselves.

On 14<sup>th</sup> January 1986 G B Robertson was in touch with the chairman of the Assemblies of God National Executive. In his letter he noted that the Chipinge Assembly was withdrawing from the Assemblies of God. He indicated that the meeting to withdraw would take place on 18<sup>th</sup> March at 7.00pm. He requested Reverend Mkwanazi or his representative to be in attendance.

### **Death of Reverend Bhengu**

Little did the Reverend Bhengu realise that the Kwekwe meeting was going to be his last in Zimbabwe. The dictated truce would be shaken to the core following his death. On a trip to Malawi Reverend Bhengu flew into Harare and, while in Harare, he phoned Geoffrey and spoke to him in proverbs, "What the Lord has shown me, I will never deviate from." Geoffrey and others around the charismatic Reverend Bhengu believed he was a prophet. "I kept trying to guess what he meant," recalled Geoffrey. Reverend Bhengu then flew to Johannesburg where he had his personal doctor, Dr Nene of Daveyton. Dr Nene had married a girl that Reverend Bhengu had raised. The two flew together to East London. Reverend Bhengu's condition was so bad that he was referred to the Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town. There he breathed his last in 1985.

Long before he died the Reverend Bhengu had anticipated his death. He chose to write down instructions that were to be followed when he died. The following, as given by John Bond (1994), were his instructions:

1 The coffin shall be supplied by the undertakers without consultation with either relatives or church people.

2 The hearse shall take the corpse from the mortuary direct to the grave and neither to my home nor to church.

3 There shall be no funeral service either at home or at the church.

4 Hymns shall be selected so-and-so and shall be sung while the coffin is being lowered.

5 No speeches, no preaching, no ceremony and no wreaths. Absolutely none.

6 Announcements on the air and press should be as follows: "Nicholas Bheka, son of Josiah Khanda, son of Yeke Bhengu, born on September 5<sup>th</sup> 1909 at Entumeni Mission Station, expelled twice for his faith by the mission as a heretic, first as a young man, 21 years old. Came back to settle at his father's land, built a home and was forced to leave in 1973 and settled at Mtunzini. Died at so-and-so at the age of so-and-so." No watch-night services anywhere and no substitutes.

7 Absolutely no slaughtering of any beast of any sort, not even a chicken and no food provisions of any kind.

8 The burial or funeral shall take place three days after my certified death and no more.

9 The funeral should take place any day of the week and should not wait for friends, relatives or church people.

10 All expenses shall have been paid for and there shall be no money collected or given for my funeral.

Could such detailed choreographing of one's funeral be an indication of one who had no confidence in other people? Before the Reverend Bhengu died he had bought a casket that was kept in Pietermaritzburg. His corpse was transported from Cape Town in another casket and this, apparently, was the casket he was buried in as the one he had bought for himself was never used.

Geoffrey and Eleanor flew from Zimbabwe to Johannesburg. They got a connecting flight and landed in Pietermaritzburg. Many people came to attend the funeral, including those from abroad. Choirs came from East London, and another came from Orlando in Johannesburg. The preacher on the day was Reverend Gumede. Certainly one of the Reverend Bhengu's wishes was ignored as his remains were interred after the three days that he had stipulated. The church service was conducted in St Peters Cathedral in Pietermaritzburg. The corpse was then taken to the Jan Smuts Stadium. There was no body viewing. A hearse took his body to its final resting place, at the Sinathingi Cemetery. He was interred next to his late wife Mylet Ndlela. He was survived by his widow Nokwethemba, two daughters and a son. Eleanor and Geoffrey sat in the front row. Reverend Bhengu had expressed the wish that no food be available, so after the funeral hungry mourners went out to restaurants. News of Reverend Bhengu's funeral was splashed across most newspapers throughout the whole of South Africa. The next day a memorial service was held in the Wesleyan Central Methodist Church at the corner of Smith and Aliwal Street in Durban.

## **Why Church Schism?**

With the death of Reverend Bhengu an important chapter was closed in the history of the Assemblies of God. He had been a towering figure, approaching iconic proportions within the church that he helped put on the international map through his charismatic preaching and spiritual healing. The period of close association with Reverend Bhengu served as an apprenticeship for Reverend Mkwanazi, both in terms of religious doctrines, but also in being prepared to step into the older man's shoes after his death. Reverend Mkwanazi viewed the church as a theocracy that should be led by a spiritual leader like Reverend Bhengu. In other words, the head of the church was, according to Reverend Mkwanazi, the equivalent of a monarch. The church, as a theocracy, run by the all powerful ordained Man of God, does not and should not lend itself to democratic principles of management and leadership. For the Reverend Mkwanazi, therefore, succession following the death of Reverend Bhengu was to be a matter of takeover by a spiritual leader anointed by the Reverend Bhengu. Only a spiritual leader can anoint another spiritual leader, it seems. Against this background, Reverend Mkwanazi thought the Kwekwe meeting would endorse his takeover as spiritual leader of the church and successor to Reverend Bhengu.

Neither young people nor women could find much democratic space in a dispensation such as that of the Assemblies of God. Youth are deemed to need constant supervision and guidance by responsible adults. The youth are seen as 'messing up'. As a result, succession is not planned for, and is not discussed until the incumbent dies. In the absence of clear-cut succession procedures, the period following the death of the incumbent 'Man of God' is



characterized by infighting, instability and tension. Schisms develop and at times lead to splintering of the once mighty united church. In the absence of clarity on succession rules and procedures, there is no meaningful unity. Instead, there is papered over unity that succumbs to the tensions of contenders when the pickings are at stake. Pastor Obed W Masuku (2010) succinctly captures the patriarchal mood over a seemingly rebellious youth, “The most saddening thing is that these things are done by his own spiritual children he nurtured and brought up.”

Though the Reverend Bhengu had several cars, as a general rule an assembly did not buy a car for its pastor. Some of his cars were in Zimbabwe though he spent most of his time in South Africa. Undoubtedly, the man possessed a lot of wealth that became subject to litigation after his death. “We never knew much about his income,” said Reverend Mkwanazi. He was given his first car by the whites in Cape Town. He, however, rejected a car that the assembly wanted to donate to him. “You will blame me tomorrow,” said Bhengu. This stance, as well as his views about employing a maid who is a member of the church and avoiding the pressure to give lifts to church members, reveals a man who did not want to be held accountable. He needed the people as an assembly to legitimise his work, but resented assembly control and accountability.

A vote of no confidence was moved against Reverend Mkwanazi at the March meeting in Kwekwe. As he saw it, pressure was coming from Harare. A meeting was then called in Gweru. To counter the possible moves by Harare against him, Reverend Mkwanazi advised the Bulawayo people, who were his supporters, not to

attend the Gweru meeting. Instead, he would attend the meeting. Harare enjoyed support from some Bulawayo people, notably Mathamsanqa Dube, Dr Cuthbert Chidoori (Tshabalala assembly), Silas Dube (Woodville assembly), Norman Mpofu, and Luka Ngwenya (in the National Executive and belonging to the Woodville assembly). The Reverend Mkwanazi stated that he did not know what it was that he had done or what he did that he should not have done. “Perhaps it was just a borrowed term (the vote of no-confidence), if it was not just tribalism,” says Reverend Mkwanazi. Oliver Chidawu was asked, “What is the problem with Reverend Mkwanazi?” The answer came, “Do you think the President would be happy if the church is led by an Ndebele person?” Following the fallout, elections for a new National Executive were held. Dr Cuthbert Chidoori, who was living in Harare at the time, landed the chairmanship, with Mathamsanqa Dube becoming the secretary. Others elected onto the executive were the following: Luka Ngwenya, Nathan Sithlaku (Harare) Major Maeresera (Harare), Chidawu (Harare), Reverend Mkwanazi (Bulawayo). Reverend Mkwanazi remembered Norman Mpofu telling him after the elections, “We have chosen our own executive, led by our own people.”

Apparently, as Reverend Mkwanazi understood it, the 1985 National Executive was still in place. This effectively meant there were two parallel executives in place. The 1985 National Executive comprised the following: Reverend Mkwanazi as Chairman, Ronnie Dlamini as Secretary, Pastor J Moyo (Luveve Assembly) and Peter Mackenzie Sibanda. Conflict was bound to take place given the existence of parallel structures both claiming to be the legitimate National Executive. All the pro-Reverend Mkwanazi

men were senior, that is older, members of the church. On the other hand, the January 1987 National Executive comprised the younger and better-educated members of the church with the likes of Dr Chidoori, Mathamsanqa Dube and Oliver Chidawu. In the litigation cases that ensued, the 1987 Executive Committee was represented by Reverend J Maeresera.

The Reverend Bhengu did not help the situation when he gave the power of attorney to Reverend Mkwanzazi on 10<sup>th</sup> of December, 1981, about four years before his death. Part of the document read as follows:

Know all Men whom it may concern

That I **Nicholas Bhekinkosi Hepworth Bhengu**

(born 5<sup>th</sup> September, 1909)

Do hereby nominate and appoint **Geoffrey Bizeni Mkwanzazi**

(born 30<sup>th</sup> August, 1929) to be my General Attorney and Agent for managing and transacting all my affairs, in Zimbabwe.

With power to ask, demand, sue for recovery and receive all debts or sums of money, goods, effects and things whatsoever, which now are, or hereinafter become, due or belonging to me: **And** to settle and adjust accounts as he shall think fit and proper, and if necessary to compound for the same and accept a part for the whole...

The document was silent on church property but was the distinction between personal and church property that clear cut?

Before we get to the gruelling litigation we need to get the story of the development of strife from Mathamsanqa Dube's viewpoint. Dube was viewed as the leader of the anti-Mkwanazi faction, although Doctor Chidoori was the chairman of the National Executive that was pitted against that led by Reverend Mkwanazi. Dube received his secondary education at Luveve Secondary School before proceeding to Mlezu College where he pursued a T2B technical course. He did the final year at the Gweru Teachers College where he received professional training as a teacher. Later, he went to do a BEd (technical vocational) course in the United Kingdom. He was posted to teach at Amaveni Secondary School in Kwekwe and in later years he became the Principal of the Gwanda Polytechnic. He studied for a Diploma in Theology from the All Africa School of Theology in South Africa. Initially, he did not have an assembly that he pastored.

A strong ally of Dube was Cuthbert Chidoori, later Dr Chidoori. The two met at Luveve Secondary where the latter, then using Mpofo as his surname, was a year behind Dube. When Dube, who many refer to as Thamu, was converted during a tent crusade, he did not have an assembly to which he belonged. "You have been saved my brother, which church are you attending?" asked Dr Chidoori. "I am with the Assemblies of God. I suggest you come along with me. If you find the church unsuitable you can always move on." "I am quite comfortable with the Assemblies of God," responded Dube. While teaching at Amaveni Secondary School, Dube became attached to the Mbizo Assembly as junior pastor. Pastor Alfred Mutasa was the senior pastor. On one occasion while Dube was arranging a flight from South Africa he got to know about Reverend Bhengu's trip to Zimbabwe. He changed his flight

so he could be on the same flight with the Reverend. “The young persons like me were perceived as bad guys. My airborne meeting with Reverend Bhengu was not seen in a positive light. The Reverend Bhengu was for financial accountability,” recalled Dube. Dube was expelled from the Mbizo Assembly. Meanwhile, at Old Mbizo there was a Mawire in charge who was not affiliated to the Back To God Crusade. Dube formed an assembly within Mbizo, bringing to three the number of assemblies in one township. Though without the necessary credentials, Dube was allowed to pastor the assembly at Mbizo. Two years down the line he got the requisite credentials and he applied for a stand on which to establish a church building. Without any support by way of a crusade, Dube managed to complete the church. Reverend Bhengu was exceedingly happy.

With the advent of independence the opportunity arose for the newer generation of black members to rise in the church. A pastor with 25 members in his assembly qualified to apply for probation as a pastor and, in 1982, Dube was given probationary status. However, he never got the necessary accreditation. He had become what Reverend Bhengu referred to as an organizer. The far-sighted Bhengu had decided on the need to have young and educated individuals come on board as administrators. In 1979 a new structure was created by Reverend Bhengu with the sole purpose of invigorating church leadership and to achieve a good measure of accountability. What Reverend Bhengu did not foresee was the animosity the organizers received at the hands of the pastors. The pastors felt threatened by the organizers who they perceived as usurpers of their power. Indeed, some of them were ambitious and sought to take over the leadership when the whites left.

Mashonaland had seven organisers, who included Oliver Chidawu, Nathan Sethlako, Amos Moyo, Dr Chidoori, Alexio Vhokoto and Clifford Rambanepasi. Matabeleland also had seven organisers, among them: Billy Mpofu, L B Ngwenya, Silas Dube, Enos Maqeda Ngwenya and Ngamla. The factionalism that ensued pitted the organisers (though they later became pastors) against the established, pro-Mkwanazi pastors.

In 1985 there was an ordinary conference where the Reverend Bhengu gave his last sermon in Kwekwe. The conference was going to elect a new National Executive and it had generally been expected that a black chairman was going to emerge. There was alleged rigging, each group vying to have as many delegates as possible on its side. In Dube's view, some pastors lacked the intellectual capacity to hold positions. "The whites were well equipped. The blacks were, however, limping. Reverend Mkwanazi admitted he was not an administrator. A legal mind was providing secretariat work. All communication was in their hands. The whites put together a team of sympathizers," recalled Dube. In terms of the constitution, from the group of fifteen organisers, only Dube qualified for election onto the National Executive, but he too had not by then got full accreditation. The rest were still on probation. The reason advanced for his failure to secure full accreditation was that he was a part time pastor. At the time he had moved to Gwanda where he was a lecturer at the Gwanda Polytechnic. "The constitution is silent on that requirement," argued Dube. There had been whites who worked for the Rhodesia Railways who had got full accreditation, despite the fact that they were part time pastors. "But the whites were misleading the black pastors into believing that part time pastors were not eligible for

election onto the National Executive. We had to blast that mentality. It was all ironic in that I had a growing assembly that built a church structure without financial support from Reverend Bhengu.” Reverend Bhengu demanded that Dube be given full credentials. The other pastors in the group of fifteen with assemblies did not qualify as they were still on probation. Pastors in this category included Oliver Chidawu, Dr Cuthbert Chidoori, Nathan Sethlako and Luka Ngwenya. When the time for electing a new National Executive came, as had been expected, a black man won the chairmanship. The new chairman was Reverend Mkwanazi. The secretary was A B Robertson. Reverend Bhengu was a member of the National Executive. “I am glad you have come in. You will help the rest,” said Reverend Bhengu when congratulating Dube on his election onto the National Executive. By the rest it was understood that he meant the young men he had chosen to become the organizers.

When Reverend Bhengu died succession took centre stage. To the blacks the matter was one of patriarchy. The first into the swimming pool, owns the pool and that gives him the right to impose African traditional ideas on succession. The whites, on the other hand, had different ideas. In their view the constitution was the guiding document and there was no room for bickering or infighting. They thus got frustrated. “Reverend Bhengu was not a leader on the basis of the constitution. He would come and summon the pastors from the black work to a meeting. Reverend Bhengu’s strategy had been to strengthen the young. Reverend Mkwanazi sensed he was being undermined by Reverend Bhengu. As a result Reverend Mkwanazi strategised that he was going to resign during the March 1985 meeting. He did not have the

acumen to read what was going on. That was what pained me. I realized he loved the church but he did not fully comprehend the intricate situation with its intrigue and grandstanding and underhand manoeuvrings,” said Dube.

The 1985 document that the Reverend Mkwanazi’s camp viewed as the official anointment was in response to the ambushing of Reverend Bhengu when he was presented with Reverend Mkwanazi’s verbal resignation during the meeting. Dube claimed that Reverend Bhengu said to Reverend Mkwanazi, “I will tell you.’ We do not know what he was told. In any case, when a teacher dies, does a student automatically become a teacher?” According to Dube black work in Zimbabwe was still under the South African nine-member General Executive. “There was fear, therefore, that the General Executive would find out about the church funds. We were not quarrelling about the pulpit. On that front we were preaching and casting out the demons,” Dube stated. Reverend Bhengu was a strategist who was able to push his agenda under apartheid. He threw his weight behind Reverend J Bond who was able to retain the post of chairman for a period of twenty-five years. In 1985 Reverend Bhengu is alleged to have said to Reverend J Bond, “I now leave the work in your hands.” With Reverend Bhengu gone, Reverend Mkwanazi saw no reason why his contemporaries like Reverend F V Shabalala should make him run. He needed autonomy.

The post Reverend Bhengu era was volatile in more ways than one. The young organizers were itching to take over from the old. Reverend Mkwanazi was pushing for independence from South Africa and the whites were disillusioned and beginning to pull out



of the church. By the time of the 3 December 1986 Christmas Conference it was clear that there was division in the church. On 31 January 1987 there was to be an extra-ordinary conference to elect two members to the National Executive, which had become vacant when the whites had pulled out of the church. Clearly, the time period did not meet the constitutional two months notice requirement. Reverend Bhengu was not keen on following constitutional dictates. He was more interested in evangelisation and church growth. Dube's view was that the whites were allowed to get away with murder and that Reverend Mkwanazi was not capable of strategising in order to bring them to account. "Inventories of property were not demanded. As a result there was no knowing what church property they were taking away. There was no confirmation of the four-fifths assembly membership majority. The issue never came up for discussion. The procedures were not followed in terms of replacing the two National Executive posts. We misled each other. The two are not chosen from the floor." Dube was chosen to the post of secretary. Reverend Mkwanazi blocked him. "I think he feared that one of the organisers was now going to be strategically positioned to read all correspondence," said Dube. In his place Reverend Mkwanazi appointed Ronnie Dlamini from the Midlands. Dube did not contest Reverend Mkwanazi's decision. There was euphoria within the organisers' camp. However, Reverend Mkwanazi poured cold water on this when he postponed the conference to February.

The organisers threatened a vote of no-confidence in the National Executive. Reverend Mkwanazi did not attend the meeting. On the motion of Amon Mutikane a vote of no-confidence was unanimously carried and the National Executive was duly

dissolved. Dube, in the absence of Reverend Mkwanazi, chaired the meeting that was attended by six of the nine-member committee. A new National Executive was elected with Dr Cuthbert Chidoori as chairman. Dube became the secretary. Reverend Mkwanazi did not recognize the new executive. The two sides refused to listen to each other. Reverend Mkwanazi initially created a counter executive but soon reverted to the 1985 National Executive. The catch though was that Dube was part of the 1985 National Executive. There was a stalemate and what followed was a gruelling war of attrition that lasted several years and was characterized by a series of lawsuits. This was a period of deep animosity. “I belonged to the Mathamsanqa group and I used to hate (Reverend) Mkwanazi. I thank the Lord, the hatred has come out of me,” said Israel Israel, who is of the opinion that the Dr Chidoori group will, at some time in the future, bounce back into leadership positions.

### **Litigation after Litigation**

A numbers of court cases were fought between the two groups, some of which involved property ownership. An example was the wrangle over the Bellevue crèche, which had been purchased by the Reverend Bhengu for the Assemblies of God. Two young women, Sally Phiri and Ms Netha ran the facility. Calderwood, Bryce Hendrie and Partners represented the Assemblies of God Church while Sandra Park, an Afro-American who had trained the two young women, was represented by Advocate S K M Sibanda of Suite Number 110 Exchange Buildings, corner Main Street and Leopold Takawira Avenue in Bulawayo. Reverend Mkwanazi admitted that he broke the law when he sold the property to Zwelibanzi Mzilethi. But Reverend Mkwanazi argued that his rivals met at the crèche premises and yet the expenses were passed onto

his faction of the church. This further wrangle was taken to the courts where Reverend Mkwanazi was represented by Joseph James, while Zwelibanzi Mzilethi was represented by David Coltart. The Reverend Mkwanazi faction won the case and got the money from the sale and deposited it with Barclays Bank. Mzilethi has, however, not paid the full amount for the crèche. “I have allowed the matter to rest,” said Reverend Mkwanazi.

There was another court case (High Court Case Number 7/10/870) in which Reverend Mkwanazi sought an interdict to prohibit Joseph Tauya, Leonard Moyo, Winnie Moyo, J Muchechetere and Daniel Moyo from entering the premises of the Assemblies of God. In his application Reverend Mkwanazi asserted that his authority to control and protect the church came from the founder of the church, the late Reverend Bhengu, who died in October 1985. “Besides being the national chairman, I am the Director of the Back To God Crusade in Zimbabwe, which is part of the Assemblies of God,” argued Reverend Mkwanazi in his affidavit. In one of the submissions it was stated that Reverend Bhengu, as founder of the church, had power to do anything in the Assemblies of God (Annexure “N”). There was yet another case involving the Dr Chidoori National Executive against Reverend Mkwanazi. The latter was being requested to hand over the church records to the new National Executive and allow them access to church properties. The case, heard in June 1987, involved the law firm Honey and Blackenberg (for National Executive chairman Dr Chidoori and Councillor Chidawu).

Many more legal firms such as James, Moyo-Majwabu and Nyoni, Brasell Sigidi and Coghlan and Welsh and Webb Low and Barry

were involved in the raging legal battles between the antagonistic factions within the Assemblies of God. In one case in 1994 Reverend Mkwanzazi was being asked to "... convene a national conference where a National Executive could be elected. The last such meeting ... had been last held in 1985 and several attempts to convene a further conference by Mr Dube (Mathamsanqa) have so far proved unsuccessful. It is also necessary that matters relating to immovable property be discussed," read part of the letter dated 09/06 1994 from Coghlan and Welsh legal practitioners to Reverend Mkwanzazi in his capacity as Chairman of the Assemblies of God National Executive.

In essence, there were two contesting National Executive bodies of the Assemblies of God, one led by Dr Chidoori and the other by Reverend Mkwanzazi. The Dr Chidoori National Executive had been elected on 31 January 1987 at Vashandiri Hall in Mkoba, Gweru. The National Executive comprised the following: Dr Chidoori (organizer), Chairman, Chidawu (organizer), E Maeresera (part time Minister), M Dube (organizer), L Ngwenya (organizer), R Dhlamini (full time Minister), N Sethlako (organizer), Treasurer, F Nyika (full time Minister) Reverend G B Mkwanzazi (full time Minister).

The new executive apparently included Reverend Mkwanzazi and had met on 14 February where a number of resolutions were passed, among them the following:

Dr Chidoori shall sign temporarily as Chief Trustee on all banking accounts of the Assemblies of God and the Back To God Crusade here in Zimbabwe with immediate effect.

Accounts affected to include all where Reverend Bhengu signed and those where Reverend F V Shabalala is signatory. Easter Conventions shall be held regionally and speakers shall be provided by the National Executive.

The other National Executive was led by Reverend Geoffrey Mkwanazi. They argued that the meeting (at Vashandiri Centre) where the Dr Chidoori led National Executive was voted into power was illegal. Those in Reverend Mkwanazi's camp drew up a response paper with regard to the January extra-ordinary Conference:

1. 1 Conference called only to elect 3 members (this too was unconstitutional). Constitution says co-opt, not elect. Vote of no confidence proposed (against Reverend Mkwanazi) and became the sole item on the agenda.
2. 2 Assemblies were not told about the dissolution of the old National Executive and reasons for vote of no confidence were not sent to assemblies all over (breach of constitution).
3. 3 Delegates were not scrutinised, constitutional procedures of election were ignored – everyone voted. This was not a conference but a congress.
4. 4 As the conference was illegal and unconstitutional, we Assemblies declare null and void the Executive elected.
5. 5 Trusteeship – Leadership was well spelt out by Reverend Bhengu in March 1985 and the South African Executive spelt out Regional Trusteeship, which we are accused of implementing.

With regard to Cause of Problems and Divisions the following three points were raised:

1. 1 Deviating from March 9 1985 directives on leadership. This is the main cause of problems in the work
2. 2 Forced to deviate from the South African Executive, now to fall under a strange self-imposed leadership
3. 3 Working against the constitution of the Assemblies of God.

In view of the above the authors of the document resolved as follows:

Those who stand with Reverend Bhengu's March 1985 Directives, South African Executive's directives in September, those who honour the AOG Constitution take stand. Now two Trustees, national and regional. Those who stand with the Regional Decide. The illegal Executive has divided the work.

We hundred percent back the resolution circulated to all Assemblies by ministers.

It is clear from the letter from Coghlan and Welsh that property was at the centre of the misunderstanding. There was yet another issue involving the Highfield house.

While the strife went on unabated, the South African Executive tried to intervene and bring sanity. In a letter written and signed by Obed W Masuku (Secretary to the Ministers Fellowship), the following points, among others, were raised:

The agenda for the extra-ordinary meeting at Vashandiri Centre changed its agenda to deal with, 'Election of three members to the

National Executive’. During the meeting the agenda was changed to ‘Vote of no confidence’.

Non-members of the Assemblies of God were allowed to vote. The meeting is thus unconstitutional.

The ministers with assemblies were not voted in, but instead the organizers who pastor no assemblies were elected onto the executive. List of ministers: Bulawayo – D Moyo, J Moyo, O Masuku, R Moyo, G Nkomo; Hwange – S Mkolo, P. Dube: Victoria Falls – D Tshuma; Gwanda – A Phiri; West Nicholson – A Masango; Stanmore – M Ndlovu.

Hwange District and Matabeleland regions have no representation in the Executive. It is evident the would-be delegates were coerced before, in order to vote for the organizers, according to the outcome of the election. How can youth leaders be leaders of the Zimbabwe Assemblies? Some are not even baptized in the Holy Spirit.

According to the constitution six members of the National Executive form a quorum, but at the meeting only four were present.

The reasons for hurrying to dissolve the old Executive were given as follows by Pastor Masuku: To acquire properties for personal glory and not for the work of God. Exercise power to control pastors and probably transfer them from places they intend to control.

To get rid of pastors and those who do not co-operate with them. The people who are now part of the Executive are those who were disbanded for dividing the work. The vote of no confidence was because the organizers wanted to get a way into the Executive, which they did.

Disregard for the directives from the South African Executive. They prefer their own Trustee whom they think will unite the work in Zimbabwe. “Unknown personalities” were allowed to vote as ministers.

As ministers we disassociate ourselves from the newly elected unconstitutional Executive as they are bent on acquiring funds and property.

The South African Executive was keen to see the raging strife come to an amicable end. On 29 May 1987 Dr Chidoori wrote a letter to Reverend Mkwanazi advising him about the intended visit by the South Africans later in the year. He wrote as follows:

Dear Rev Mkwanazi,

Re: Meeting with South African Executive – 13<sup>th</sup> June 1987

Greetings in the name of the Lord Jesus!

The South African Executive has advised us that they shall be coming to Zimbabwe on the 13<sup>th</sup> June 1987, on condition that we confirm to them that we are willing to meet with you. As an Executive we are most willing to meet with you, as we have always indicated in the past. For the progress and unity of the Lord’s work in our country, I wish therefore to invite you to be in attendance at this meeting. For ease of transportation of the brethren from the different parts of the country, this meeting will be held in Kwekwe, at the Mbizo Assembly Church Hall, Mbizo Township. A preliminary session commencing at 10.00 hrs for all Assemblies of God pastors only, will be followed by a plenary session at 14.00 hrs.



Yours Sincerely in Christ,

Cuthbert Chidoori  
Chairman – National Executive  
Assemblies of God

A conference in Zimbabwe was held from November 11 to 13 1988 and was attended by the members of the Assemblies of God (General Executive), whose chair was J S W Bond. Also included in the South African delegation were the following: J Donda, S Mosehla, V Nkomonde and F Shabalala. W K Makinana arrived late because of visa problems. J S W Bond acted as its chairman.

In his write-up of the visit Bond commented on the situation in Zimbabwe: there are two factions in the work, namely those led by the Reverend Geoffrey Mkwanazi and those led by Dr Cuthbert Chidoori and Mr Oliver Chidawu. Each side looks to its own executive, but latterly Reverend Geoffrey Mkwanazi has reverted to the Executive elected in 1985. None of these three executives has power to act in any legally binding way. This has been proved in court cases. An impasse exists and there is a serious fear that the courts might become impatient with the quarrel and appoint a liquidator to dissolve the movement.

Bond's report advised against further litigation, lest a Pandora's Box be opened. Both parties did acknowledge the authority of the General Executive, but Bond's delegation recommended the seeking of a mandate rather than prescribing a solution. For three

years there had not been an effective executive and both sides were amenable to the holding of a conference to resolve the issue.

Then the report focused on Reverend G Mkwanazi's attitude. In May this year when I visited Zimbabwe, Brother Mkwanazi agreed to the calling of a conference by the South African Executive, but in fact expressed a preference that the South African Executive should take over completely and that Zimbabwe should function without an Executive.

On November 3 this year, Reverend Mkwanazi stated he would be most happy to attend a conference called by the South African Executive, but complained that the present conference appeared to have been called in response to a request from Dr Chidoori. He therefore declined to attend it for that reason, but on being persuaded, he promised to attend with 3 or 4 delegates. In the event he and his followers boycotted the conference in spite of our presence there.

The delegation then decided to arrange a meeting in Reverend Mkwanazi's house at Number 111 Matopos Road. Meeting with Reverend Mkwanazi's 1985 Executive was not in any way a tacit recognition of that Executive. Bond's delegation merely sought Reverend Mkwanazi signature on the document of cession to allow the South African Executive to run the work in Zimbabwe, pending the holding of a conference at which a substantive Executive would be elected.

“Unfortunately we had a very poor reception, one might say, a churlish reception. The South African Executive was verbally

attacked; I was verbally attacked. We asked to see the local congregation but access was denied us. Geoffrey Mkwanazi agreed that a conference is necessary, and said he would do ‘something’ but refused to say what he would do.”

A meeting with the Gweru people was arranged and the delegation reported on that meeting and contrasted it with the frosty reception they got from Bulawayo.

“By contrast with our Bulawayo visit, the Gweru gathering was cordial, spiritual and anointed. A sense of revival blessing pervaded the atmosphere. At times a spontaneous joy characterized the singing. The discussions were frank, often fiery but always amenable to reason and persuasion. The meeting complained bitterly about the Executive, even charging that Geoffrey Mkwanazi was being favoured by them. They said the present impasse had been brought about by the Executive’s actions.”

A hundred and fifty signatures were gathered affirming submission to the General Executive and permitting the General Executive to convene a conference with a view to electing a new Executive for Zimbabwe.

Having said all that the delegation had to say, Bond made his personal conclusions as follows:

1. The paramount need is to bring all parties together in a conference and to elect a new Executive. Failure in this could result in the Court appointing a liquidator to dissolve the movement.
2. All parties agree on the need for a conference.

3. By precedent as the mother body to whom all parties look, the SA Executive has the right and the duty to take the initiative in calling a conference.
4. Properties and moneys are involved. These must remain frozen until a new Executive is functioning.
5. If it is impossible to persuade the Mkwanazi faction to attend the conference, we will have no alternative but to recognize the Chidoori group and declare the Mkwanazi faction as schismatic.

At one time there was a squabble relating to the chairs at the crèche. The matter was reported to the police who came in search of Reverend Mkwanazi. Danisa Moyo was arrested over the issue but Reverend Geoffrey Mkwanazi escaped. When the police got to the Assemblies of God office in Colonial Mutual Building at the corner of Main Street and 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue that was staffed by Eunice, they did not find the Reverend Mkwanazi. When the police went down using the lift, the Reverend Mkwanazi was in another lift going up to the office. That was how he escaped overnight detention in police cells.

*“Sivela kude ezimpini,”* We have come from far with these wars, said the Reverend Mkwanazi with a deep sigh. The inevitable then happened. The conventions separated. Reverend Mkwanazi’s faction was left with Matabeleland, Manicaland, and had a few loyalists in Kadoma. Gweru was also on his side, while Hwange remained aloof. Part of Kadoma, Chegutu, part of Mutare, Harare and Mashonaland Provinces were loyal to the Chidoori-led National Executive

Reverend Mkwanazi and his supporters felt isolated. Reverend F V Shabalala supported the Harare National Executive. He invited some white and coloured pastors from KwaZulu-Natal to attend meetings in Harare. Reverend Mkwanazi was not to be outclassed in efforts to invite foreign dignitaries to lend support and credibility to his own faction. Reverend Nicholas Masupi from the Limpopo Regional leadership began sending them speakers for the youth. Khanye was one speaker who came to Matabeleland to preach. “There was stiff competition to woo foreign speakers,” said Geoffrey.

In South Africa the biggest Centre for the Church is at Thaba Nchu Centre. The Chidoori faction was recognized at that level while that led by Reverend Mkwanazi was shunned. The former were invited to conferences at the Centre, while the latter were not. “The fires of competition were being stoked by Reverend Tshabalala,” stated Reverend Mkwanazi. Reverend Masupi stood firm with the Reverend Mkwanazi faction. Internally there were good relations between Reverend Mkwanazi’s group and people from Chipinge and they visited each other.

There was a wrangle pertaining to Reverend Bhengu’s house in Highfield. The Reverend Mkwanazi had the title deeds to the house. The quarrel was part of a wider squabble over the property of Reverend Bhengu. In addition to the house in Highfield, there were three cars – a *Chevrolet*, a *Peugeot 404* and a *Nissan Pulsar* bought from a white man who was leaving the country. There was also a fully furnished house in Famona, which Reverend Bhengu’s wife used whenever she was in Bulawayo. The house was carpeted throughout. Geoffrey and Eleanor had assisted in furnishing the

house. Some of the properties became a matter for litigation. Reverend Bhengu's wife sold one of the cars to a teacher at Waterford. Its ownership was changed. The *Pulsar* disappeared, and "... we believe it was sold and they changed registration particulars," Reverend Mkwanazi said. As far as the house in Highfield was concerned... "I have surrendered trying to reclaim it." Daniel Kariwo continues to live in the house.

The house at Tshabalala, which had been bought by the church, was sold by the Reverend Mkwanazi faction, together with the *Chevrolet*. The proceeds from the sales were deposited at the Barclays Bank. Emmanuel Machazire, who kept the books of accounts, and Happy Mzuku, now in Birmingham, signed the legal documents.

The house in Famona was bartered for a plot in Douglasdale, which was owned by a Mr Ndlovu who wanted a house nearer the city. The plot had been productive; there was a thriving piggery, as well as cattle and poultry projects. The house had its furniture taken across the border to South Africa. "We heard furniture had been taken across the border by a removal truck to KwaNdebele where Mrs Bhengu had a house." Here we suspected collusion by some members of the church in Bulawayo."

Reverend Mkwanazi came under severe criticism. He was accused of selling the Belleview property. "Of course it was not a right decision. The Belleview people are now using a school for the services. I am sure (Zwelibanzi) Mzilethi would allow me to use it as a church." He was also accused of disposing of the Famona house.

*“Izimpi zechurch!”* The church wars!

Out of the schisms within the church, new movements have developed. Some as a result of phenomenal growth. Beyond a certain threshold, an organization can become inefficient. The centre can no longer hold. The emerging smaller units are better placed to sustain growth. The organisational objectives are better articulated and attained. The vision is clearer and the smaller numbers within the leadership echelons translate to better coordination and organisational cohesion and culture. Within the Assemblies of God there have been breakaways, such as that led by Silas Dube whose church is at Nkulumane. Another breakaway church was that founded by Rustin Moyo, who established the Tabernacle in Entumbane. Mrs Margaret Mhlanga leads the Oasis of Life in Botswana while Silas Dube runs the Impact Ministry. The churches that split away have maintained ties with the parent church – the Assemblies of God. “They are saying, ‘You are our father. The population is big. We cannot pretend that we can place all of them under a single church’. As an adult, I tried to accommodate them.” In Reverend Mkwanzazi’s view what leads to the establishment of several splinter churches is money. He cites the case of a pastor who broke away from Collin Nyathi’s Harvest International Church. The greed to get rich is at the core of the schisms. Some people do not want to submit themselves to the leadership. There are rebellious elements that love to be independent. Further, the Reverend Mkwanzazi cites the case of a pastor of the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA) who left the church to join the Assemblies of God. What this particular pastor had resented with the ZAOGA in Bulawayo was that preaching was done in Shona. The language issue is a sensitive one

and has led to wrangles within the Wesleyan Methodist Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Bulawayo. The bone of contention has been over the indigenous language to be used – whether Ndebele or Shona. Poor administration is another factor that Reverend Mkwanazi identified as contributing to the church schisms. “Well, there are numerous reasons that can be advanced. All of them though relate to selfishness, just as is the case in politics,” concluded Reverend Mkwanazi.

In order to have a common approach to issues, the Assemblies of God have sought membership of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), which is chaired by Dr Goodwill Shana. The EFZ brings together Pentecostal churches, although there are some evangelical churches such as the Brethren In Christ Church (BICC) and the Baptist Church, which are not Pentecostal in approach. Both the Evangelicals and the Pentecostals are agreed that one must repent and be born again. The Pentecostals go a step further and say that one must be filled with the Holy Spirit. There are a number of manifestations of the presence of the Holy Ghost, among them speaking in tongues/glossolalia (Acts 1 Vs 1). Reverends Bhengu and Huggins were men driven by the Holy Spirit. Reverend Mkwanazi acknowledged that he does not have this particular gift. “In terms of the gift of placing hands on someone’s head and driving out the demons, my wife is good at that. I do not have the gift.”

The other gifts are prophesy, spiritual healing, discernment and interpretation. It is these gifts of the Holy Ghost that have provided the Pentecostal movement with its allure and its phenomenal growth, particularly in the Third World. Reverend Mkwanazi was



able to identify other characteristics of the Assemblies of God, or the Pentecostal movement in general, that explain their appeal to the younger folk. The young are not keen on the old songs. The lively and captivating Praise and Worship sessions strike an important chord in the hearts of the youth. New songs are being composed whose beat and rhythm are in tune with the expectations of the youth. There should be no gap, in terms of music and dance, between the secular and the divine. Repetition in singing, appeals to the young and is traditionally African. The repetitive singing prepares the right conditions for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The prayers in conventional churches send people to sleep, especially if overly long and monotonous. The mass prayer characteristic of the Pentecostal movement creates an atmosphere that is filled with the Holy Spirit and praying people begin to speak in tongues.

### **Factions Reconcile**

Conflict is costly in more ways than one. Where there is conflict the objectives of an organization become difficult to achieve. The various members of the organization work at cross-purposes. A lot of energy is channelled to wrong pursuits. The common vision is lost and the esprit de corps among the work force dissipates. There is mutual suspicion and witch-hunting. Organizational growth is inhibited. Such challenges do not spare church organisations. The Assemblies of God went through all the above until measures were taken to rectify the situation.

Reconciliation presents practical challenges. There are at least two sides to any conflict and the first challenge is to bring the sides together. They must, before any moves are taken, appreciate that

the current situation is untenable. They must be convinced of the need to do something and that all sides have a role to play. It really behoves them to take positive steps to bring about the desired condition, that is, to restore the equilibrium. An arbiter, one with special qualities of peacemaking, must be sought to bring the warring parties together.

The two factions in the Assemblies of God had dragged each other to the courts. For twelve years they worked separately. Each side maintained it was the legitimate faction. Reconciling the two sides required that the two showed total commitment and appreciated the benefits that would accrue from reconciliation. Mathamsanqa Dube went to the United Kingdom to pursue further studies. While outside the country he seized the opportunity to study the Assemblies of God constitution and reflect on the strife that had torn the church apart. He appreciated his centrality to the strife and that he was obliged to initiate reconciliation. He came back home in 1989, made contact with Reverend Mkwanazi and impressed upon him that the strife could be resolved through the initiative of the 1985 National Executive. He discussed the issue with some of the pastors from the Reverend Mkwanazi camp. There were no immediate results. "It was like I was the only one who believed things could change," said Dube. Some of the older members in the Reverend Mkwanazi camp died, notably Joel Moyo and Ronnie Dlamini. It was the death of Dlamini that provided Dube and Reverend Mkwanazi with an opportunity to talk over the matter. Dube was delayed in getting to the funeral in the Midlands. When he arrived, Reverend Mkwanazi was preaching. "Reverend Mkwanazi was rough in his preaching. He referred to the division in the church," said Dube. The two met after the sermon and

Reverend Mkwanazi said to Dube, “For how long should we continue fighting? Let us resolve our differences.” Later, Reverend Mkwanazi called Dube aside. “I did not appreciate discussing the matter at a funeral. I was ducking and diving.”

At the time, about 1996/97, there were only three surviving members from the 1985 National Executive. Dube was not keen to discuss with Reverend Mkwanazi alone. Some would see the whole issue then as between two Ndebele persons. It was important to include Elliot Major Maeresera from Harare. The surviving trio agreed to meet. At the time the Reverend Mkwanazi group did not have an office, they were using the Queen’s Park church as a base from where to operate. Dube’s group operated from Hermco Building at the corner of Main Street and Sixth Avenue. After the initial meeting involving the three, there was a further meeting that involved members from Reverend Mkwanazi’s group: Dominic Mkhosi, Peter Mackenzie Sibanda, Mbuso Nyathi, Danisa Moyo, Tapela Nleya and Ndiweni. The meeting was held at 111 Matopos Road. “It was an interrogation and our group had refused to attend the meeting,” said Dube, who was without supporters at the meeting. Members of his group thought it was all a waste of time, an exercise in futility.

More contacts were then made between the two executives. Dube was able to write to John Bond that Reverend Mkwanazi was willing to talk. Bond was willing to come to Zimbabwe. A breakthrough seemed imminent. When the Rand District Council had tried to broker reconciliation, their efforts came unstuck. “They thought they had muscle and money. They failed. We disagreed on protocol. How could a sub-structure come to talk to a

national structure? We objected to their arrogance to run us down,” said Dube. A meeting was now called at Sethlako’s place in Kwekwe. It was at that meeting that yet another meeting was called, again in Kwekwe, some time in March. All the pastors were invited. The South African Executive was also present. John Bond and his wife drove all the way from Cape Town. The venue was the church building that Dube had built when he was at Mbizo Township. “The spirit was nice,” remembered Dube.

Reverend Mkwanzazi had at one time visited a seminary in Nairobi, Kenya. Dr Munale, a Kenyan, had then been invited to come over to Zimbabwe and indeed, soon after Reverend Mkwanzazi’s return, he had packed his bags and followed. He came to live with the Mkwanzazis at their house at 111 Matopos Road. Dr Munale used to wake up early in the morning to pray for success in his endeavour to bring the two factions together. He had realized that the prevailing situation could not continue.

At the meeting in Kwekwe there was no agreement. On their return from the meeting there was a traffic accident involving the kombi that Reverend Mkwanzazi was supposed to have travelled in. Just before the kombi set off Sam Maphosa approached Reverend Mkwanzazi, who was sitting in the front, and said to him, “Please Reverend, get down and go to that car belonging to Amos Moyo.” Reverend Mkwanzazi stopped to talk to some church members while Sam Maphosa removed Reverend Mkwanzazi’s goods from the kombi and put them in Moyo’s car. Maphosa then took the place of Reverend Mkwanzazi in the kombi, which then took off. When Reverend Mkwanzazi completed his conversation with the church members, he realized the kombi had gone and that he had

no choice but to get into Moyo's car. "I travelled with my enemies. I was the hated one who was to be killed," said Reverend Mkwanazi with hindsight.

Reverend Mkwanazi was driven home and dropped at his gate, where Eleanor welcomed them. There they heard the tragic news that the kombi had been involved in the traffic accident. "Stop Baba, the kombi overturned and one passenger died on the spot. Another man is unconscious and has been taken to Kwekwe Hospital." The passenger who was admitted into Kwekwe Hospital later died. Another passenger sustained multiple fractures. Where there is mutual suspicion sometimes unfounded allegations fly about. There were allegations that the kombi tyres had been tampered with. The effect of the rumours was to reinforce the feeling that, if Reverend Mkwanazi had been in the kombi, and sitting in the front seat, he would not have survived. That did not help the reconciliation effort. The accident saga was further exacerbated by Reverend Mkwanazi having been involved in another traffic accident involving his *Mercedes Benz*. That freak accident had taken place in South Mpopoma in Bulawayo. In 2005 Reverend Mkwanazi was involved in yet another accident while on his way to Chipinge.

African belief posits that behind every action there is a cause. Things just do not happen independently of human or superhuman agency. Where there is friction and misunderstanding, pointing fingers at one's perceived enemies as the people behind any misfortune is common. "The second accident took place (we believe it was designed to kill (him)) in 1998. When the reconciliation meetings were at their peak, it was

decided that one be held in Kwekwe...” (Masuku, 2010:100). That misfortune notwithstanding, there was determination to work towards reconciliation. For Dube the accident was a painful wound. “That thing (the accident) devastated me. I was driving the whole thing, with doubting Thomases in the boat.” Six months later, in September 1998, a new National Executive was elected with Reverend Mkwanazi as chairman and Dube as secretary. “As promised during the reconciliation, I served one term and retired from standing. This is being made to accommodate (Reverend) Mkwanazi.

“Church work is run from Hermco Building. We are working quite well. It was really a healing process. We still struggle with our constitution.” One aspect of the constitution that is being looked into is the creation of a Spiritual Leader post, tailor-made for Reverend Mkwanazi. Dube now works with the PMU Inter-Life. Luka Ngwenya says, with regard to the future, “We want a leader of the church, as opposed to a chairman.” The National Executive will have some of its powers taken over by the Leadership, comprising the Church Leader and his two deputies. In the event of the Spiritual Leader’s death, one of the deputies will be seconded by the Electoral College to the post of Spiritual Leader. The new leadership will have structures going down to the provinces. The argument for the Spiritual Leader is that he is the focus of the church and provides it with the necessary energy and vision to move the church forward. What is not clear though is the tenure for the Spiritual Leader. Precedence suggests that founding Spiritual Leaders die in office. Is this what the Assemblies of God want? A Spiritual Leader is surrounded with an aura and is not to be challenged or questioned. By referring to him as Baba, that term

invokes African ideas of one who is unassailable, one beyond reproach by his 'children'. The post-Reverend Mkwanazi era within the Assemblies of God will have to grapple with these vexatious issues of governance.

Efforts at reconciliation continued. Reverend Geoffrey Mkwanazi was chairperson of the legal committee. Meanwhile, Dube called upon a white man from Georgia in Cape Town to come and facilitate. When he came he lived in Reverend Geoffrey Mkwanazi's house. "I tried hard to behave well. I looked after him well. There were a lot of people who were spoilers in Harare. I worked with elders who would not do that. It was a numbers game," said Reverend Geoffrey Mkwanazi. The conference took place in the Baptist Church. There were several delegates who had been invited from South Africa – both black and white. A man from America was asked to make a speech. The conference was going to be voted in in the afternoon. It was the conference that would emerge after the voting that was going to be tasked with the responsibility of uniting the two factions.

The Reverend Mkwanazi faction comprised some known but unregistered elders. Consequently, some of them were disqualified. Names were suggested from both factions. Dr Cuthbert Chidoori, Mathamsanqa Dube, Reverend Geoffrey Mkwanazi and Oliver Chidawu were among those elected. Reverend Geoffrey Mkwanazi was elected chairman while Mathamsanqa Dube became secretary. A new Executive Committee was in place. History had indeed been made. A draft constitution was crafted and a Trust Company was to look after church property. "In essence it was not genuine spiritual reconciliation. It was just at the top, and not at the

grassroots,” said Reverend Geoffrey Mkwanzazi about the outcome of the conference.

The uneasy truce was evident when it came to officiating at marriages. Those who were loyal to Reverend Mkwanzazi continued to come to him, “But the Harare people came to support those who were against me. They did not seek my services as marriage officer.” It’s been years since the troubles ended. “Now there are new people who do not know anything about the problems. This is leading to a new situation,” asserted Reverend Mkwanzazi. When the first post-reconciliation National Executive ran its full course, Reverend Mkwanzazi turned down nomination arguing he was old, “Meetings are strenuous, so I needed a rest.” Moyo took over as chairman and later Dr Chidoori succeeded him. Reverend Mkwanzazi maintained his current chairmanship is a temporary one, a mere stop-gap measure. He observed that there are strong sentiments against the idea of a Spiritual Leader. “The people on the National Executive were not on my side but now they respect me. These days I shall live well. I am getting the respect that I deserve.” As efforts are currently under way to revise the constitution, Reverend Mkwanzazi is still in support of having a Spiritual Leader, as is the case with many other Pentecostal movements, such as the Family of God (FOG) where Apostle Andrew Utawunashe is the Spiritual Leader; Harvest International where Collin Nyathi is the Spiritual Leader; and Word of Life where Dr Goodwill Shana is Spiritual Leader. Another good example is that of Archbishop Ezekiel Guti of the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa. The idea of a spiritual leader seems to work well for as long as the founding leader lives. He or she certainly provides the necessary cohesion within the movement,



especially if he/she is charismatic and is well endowed with healing and other gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In most cases the successor is not obvious in the absence of bureaucratic arrangements. The Man of God at the top uses his aura and spiritual endowment to keep everything intact. When he dies the church will, more often than not, experience schisms as various people throw in the gauntlet to lead the church. Some of these leaders give themselves high-sounding spiritual titles so as to make themselves unassailable. Titles have at times been borrowed from the mainstream churches. Usually, the chosen or preferred titles are those for the very highest office within church organisations. An Apostle at the helm of the church may have a number of Bishops below him, all looking to take over from him, not when he is old or incapacitated, but only when he has been recalled to the presence of the Lord in Heaven. This seems to be an Africa tradition in practice, where no sun rises before the other has set, or expressed differently, there are never two suns in the sky at the same time. Emphasizing the need for a Spiritual Leader, the Reverend Mkwanazi said, “They will choose their own Spiritual Leader. I don’t know where they will get one to lead nationally. Spiritual leadership is in me. I do not have to be elected into it. One can be leader for forty years or twenty years at work. You need a rallying point, one that is spiritual and not secular. Democracy may not always work.”

### **Some observations**

Multiple voices have been given expression. What remains is to interrogate them and see where the problems lie. It is when the problems are clearly identified that lasting, not cosmetic, solutions

may be found. There should be no room for pretence. A common understanding of the issues is critical so that a common vision is created and nurtured. Succession is an issue that seems to present serious challenges to Pentecostal churches. It is important to pinpoint the difference between the churches in this category and the old more conventional churches with roots in the western world. Nowadays, many of the Pentecostal churches in Africa are fairly new and are independent of organic links with the West. They have in some instances spread to the diaspora, but only to serve the flock in that part of the world and tap into resources that are generally more available. The Pentecostal churches have not been spared the wealth gospel. In Zimbabwe the years of hyperinflation were cushioned by the diaspora branches of some of the Pentecostal churches.

Succession in Africa also presents challenges on the political front. The problem, it would seem, is not so much about serving the people, as it is to access and retain to self, family and close relatives the wealth that goes with the post. The founders of churches, who happen to be senior pastors, have not, as a general rule, instituted bureaucratic structures within which matters of succession are moderated. Financial matters are shrouded within the mists of spiritual aura and reverence that attend the founder and Spiritual Leader of the church. In African terms founding something, including a church, carries with it a sense of unassailable ownership. As a result, the founder will cling to power even when he is advanced in age. Talking of succession is taboo and treasonous. The explosions are delayed until after the death of the all powerful Spiritual Leader.

Parallelism occasioned by racist prejudices allowed for the continuation of African ideas of succession. Racism incubated African ideas of succession and militated against the development of a democratic, open and transparent system of accountability. Rather ironically, some of the churches have jumped onto the bandwagon of transparency and democracy, when evidence on the ground points to a glaring absence of the very principles and values that they purport to espouse.

Where a founder is endowed with healing powers, his power is even more accentuated so that the very idea of retirement does not arise. There is no talk of replacing such a leader until after his own death. He is then inevitably succeeded by someone with similar qualities. The adherents will certainly demand no less than what the previous leader provided – spiritual healing and its attendant aura and mysticism. Where the person and organisation are interlinked, property ownership becomes a challenge. There usually is no distinction between what belongs to the church and what belongs to the founder or leader of the church. The surviving widow, stripped of the late husband's aura and protection, is vulnerable. Property wrangles may threaten to tear apart the church. The critical question is whether the church is built around a person or whether it is an independent organism that has people who come to serve it and then leave it intact.

Quite often the person and organization are inseparable. The founder is the church and the church is the founder. After him there must be continuity and that takes the form of him being succeeded by one like him, and one liked by him in life. In African patriarchal terms the man is represented by his son. Where there is

no son, a male relative is next in line. That apparently has not always been the case. Where there is a daughter instead of a son, a son-in-law may be next. At least then wealth is retained within the family.

Patronage is strong in organizations that are dominated by one individual, more so when such individuals are founders and are thus seen as owners. The culture of the organization is not enshrined in its own values; rather the caprices of the powerful leader and founder are pervasive. Conflict will then be the order of the day. Unfortunately, the individually dominated church has no conflict resolution arrangements. The founder is left alone with hand picked members to deal with errant and vociferous individuals who do not want to toe the line or see more that they are supposed to see. See and shut up, is the dictum for survival. Litigation then ensues, especially when the founder is recalled to higher life. Litigation will not only be about succession issues, but also about the vast wealth accumulated by the church through the efforts of the founder.

Crushing dissent in religious contexts can be done ruthlessly. Dissenters are seen as ambassadors of the Devil who must be dealt with brutally and mercilessly. The founder leader will take advantage of the pulpit to spew venom at his detractors, who either will acquiesce or be forced to move on to other churches. Alternatively they will form their own churches, where they will get into the shoes of their persecutor and deal with dissent in exactly the same way. Victims are sometimes the best imitators.

The struggle for power takes many forms. Very often ethnicity has been at the core of competition, where it is used to justify the politics of exclusion. The rebellious elements will rush to the conclusion that they are being persecuted on the grounds of their ethnic identity. Ethnicity, if not properly handled, may tear apart a church. This is common in cases where diversity is not tolerated. People differ in many ways, ethnic identity being one of them. Failure to recognise and deal with diversity leads to conflict that in its wake leaves a church torn to the core. Where there is division people tend to side with those of their own culture or ethnic identity. Where blind loyalty fights objectivity, sustainable conflict resolution suffers.

Bible school curricula do not generally equip students with the leadership skills that are needed in life. The spiritual leader operates within an organization. The message that he has must find expression through an organized structure. Spirituality on its own may not suffice. It is critical to balance spirituality with sound leadership principles that find expression within a formally constituted religious organization. This happens to be the greatest challenge facing Pentecostal churches at this juncture. The training curriculum needs to be looked at more thoroughly and beefed up to include issues such as conflict resolution, group dynamics and leadership principles, in addition to knowledge of the Bible.

The Gospel is open to various interpretations. Within the same church there can be different interpretations of the same text. That can easily lead to misunderstandings and, in the absence of laid down procedures to deal with such diverse and conflicting views, the church can be torn apart.

60 - 61Hermco Building  
6th Ave / Main 1503  
BULAWAYO



*Assemblies of God*

Telephone: 76528

## NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

15 June 1998

TO ALL:     1)     Assemblies of God Churches  
              2)     Accredited Ministers  
              3)     Recognised Elders  
              4)     Recognised delegates

Dear Brethren,

Greetings in the Almighty name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

RE:     CIRCULAR: CALLING FOR A NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF ASSEMBLIES OF GOD.

Dates: 11 to 13 September 1998

According to the constitution of the Assemblies of God (clause 5a) a Conference is to be held every two years. Furthermore it is required that two months notice be given for convening the Conference (clause 5c).


The Assemblies of God National Conference was last held in 1985. Since then there have been problems within the movement. Thus it is our endeavour to have a lasting solution by calling a National Conference according to the Constitution.


The venue will be provisionally at Mbizo Church Hall in Kwekwe. All Assemblies are required to register themselves by end of June with the undersigned for purposes of accreditation of delegates and registration of the said Assemblies.


All Pastors should be registered through their groupings and names submitted to the undersigned by end of June for accreditation purposes before the Conference. It is hoped that the registration and accreditation exercise will be completed by mid July. Then the lists of registered members of the conference will be circulated to the leadership of the groups that will come to the conference in September.

**NB**     Voting for the New National Executive will take place in the afternoon of the 12th September 1998 at the Conference venue. A list of Ministers of good standing and integrity will have been drawn up for nomination and the conference will adopt these names for election purposes.

Yours in the Lord's Service

  
M. DUBE (Tham)  
(Secretary)

  
G. B. MKWANAZI  
(Chairman)  
**REV. G. B. MKWANAZI**  
**ASSEMBLIES OF GOD**  
**(BACK TO GOD CRUSADE)**  
P.O. BOX 110  
BULAWAYO ZIMBABWE AFRICA

  
E. M. MAERESERA  
(Member)

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60 - 61 Hermco Building  
6th Ave / Main 1503  
BULAWAYO



*Assemblies of God*

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Telephone: 76528

## NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

15 June 1998

TO ALL:       1) Assemblies of God Churches  
                  2) Accredited Ministers  
                  3) Recognised Elders  
                  4) Recognised delegates

Dear Brethren,

Greetings in the almighty name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

RE:    PREPARATION FOR THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE AOG IN SEPTEMBER 1998

Attached with this letter please find the circular calling for the National Conference of Assemblies of God. Members are encouraged to respond actively to the circular.

Other preparatory details are as follows:


- 1) A pre-conference retreat of all pastors will be held at Mbizo church hall in Kwekwe on 17 to 19 July 1998. Assemblies are requested to facilitate transport and other incidentals for the workers amongst them.
- 2) A list of all Assemblies and workers registered in various groupings will be published for scrutiny and correction at the July meeting at Mbizo.
- 3) All workers who will have submitted their names will be issued with credentials at the July meeting in Kwekwe.
- 4) Assemblies are reminded that only ministers with full credentials are eligible to be voted into the National Executive . (clause 7b).
- 5) Probationary ministers are not eligible to be voted into the National Executive. (clause 46e)
- 6) Accredited Elders and delegates cannot be voted into the National Executive.
- 7) All fully accredited ministers, accredited probationary ministers. accredited Elders and delegates have equal voting rights in the Conference.
- 8) Accreditation of Assemblies shall be in accordance with clause 30a of the Constitution.
- 9) The mid-July retreat will cover more preparations for the conference eg. nomination procedures and voting for the 1998 Executive. Teachings in this regard will be given in detail at the retreat and thereafter.

**NB** A) The remnant of the 1985 Executive recognises and appreciates the difficulties that will be faced by some Assemblies or groupings in complying with the basic requirements of the Conference. We therefore commit ourselves to be available for consultation or if called upon to a meeting, to clarify some of the pertinent issues related to the Conference.

Please feel free to indicate how we can be of service to you before the Conference.

B) Please avail yourselves of the copies of the Constitution of the AOG and be acquainted with its provisions so as to contribute in an informative way during the Conference.

- |           |  |    |   |
|-----------|--|----|---|
| Names: 1) | G.B. Mkwanzai<br>111 Matopos Road<br><u>Bulawayo</u>             | or | Assemblies of God<br>P.O. Box 110<br><u>Bulawayo</u>                    |
|           | Tel: 19 - 42944  |    | Tel: 19-227148  |
| 2)        | E.M Maeresera<br>48 Mukonde Street<br><u>Mufakose</u>            | or | Assemblies of God<br>P.O. Box 4254<br><u>Harare</u>                     |
|           | Tel: 14 - 66256  |    | Tel: 14-750821  |
| 3)        | M. Dube<br>Gwanda Zintec College<br>P. Bag 5832<br><u>Gwanda</u> | or | Assemblies of God<br>P.O. Box 1503<br>6th Ave / Main<br><u>Bulawayo</u> |
|           | Tel: 184- 2315; 2390   |    | Tel: 19-76528   |

Signed by:   
G.B. MKWANAZI  
**REV. G. B. MKWANAZI**  
ASSEMBLIES OF GOD  
(BACK TO GOD CRUSADE)  
P.O. BOX 110  
BULAWAYO ZIMBABWE AFRICA

  
E.M. MAERESERA

  
M. DUBE

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## *Chapter 12*

# **A Time of Celebration – Golden Jubilee**

A gentle breeze ruffled the leaves of the red flowered flamboyant trees that fringe Leopold Takawira Avenue in Bulawayo. Large crowds of ecstatic people, all followers of the Assemblies of God, started forming in the car park on the eastern side of the Bulawayo City Hall, an imposing colonial structure developed on the site where, in 1896, the beleaguered white settlers repelled the charging Ndebele soldiers. The centre of attraction was the lanky Reverend Mkwanzazi, who was standing by a prestigious *Toyota Prado*. He held an umbrella to ward off the oppressive heat of the summer sun.

There was a banner that told what the function was all about: “*Sivela Kude Ngomsebenzi WeNkosi: 1959-2009*”. It was the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of the Assemblies of God in Zimbabwe. The church colours, red, white, yellow, black and olive green, created a nostalgic ambience. The energetic singing was done in three languages, SiNdebele, Shona and English. *Somlandela, Tomutevera*, We shall follow Him (Jesus). From the City Hall car park the carnival parade streamed into Leopold Takawira Avenue, a road named after a founder member of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). There had been resistance from the ZAPU dominated Bulawayo City Council to the naming of streets after ZANU personalities.

At the intersection of Leopold Takawira and Fife Street the procession turned left and proceeded down Fife Street. The road is wide with centre parking. When city planner Patrick Fletcher designed the city after the demise of the Ndebele State he had the 16-span ox-wagon in mind; the roads were to be wide enough to allow space for the ox-wagon to turn around without difficulty. Curious crowds began to flank the street to catch a glimpse of the colourful procession. Banners were held high in front of the marchers from each assembly: Gweru, Harare, Bulawayo, Chinhoyi, West Nicholson, Beitbridge, Zvishavane, Lupane, Plumtree and Maphisa. The *vuvuzela* trumpets blared, adding more colour and ceremony to the spiritual fanfare. There was excitement in soccer circles as the following year, 2010, the world soccer spotlight was going to fall on Zimbabwe's neighbour, South Africa. The *vuvuzelas* had taken South Africa by storm, and they had spilled across the border to Zimbabwe, and even religious gatherings were not spared. As the procession marched down Fife Street more and more onlookers thronged the wide street to catch sight of the marchers holding colourful banners: red lettering on a white background.

Car horns blared, adding to the *vuvuzela* sounds that echoed against the towering National Railways of Zimbabwe building, a grey concrete skyscraper without match in the city. The church song was influenced by the toyi-toyi rhythm from post-independence days. Toyi-toyi was the military music that the guerrillas in training camps used. The returning Zipra cadres were a pleasure to watch and listen to when they performed the toyi-toyi from the days of the armed struggle. Innovative song-writers had incorporated this type of music into church music. Relevance.

Currency. There were wild ululations from the women folk who constituted the majority of the marchers. Their male counterparts responded with ear-piercing catcalls. The atmosphere was electric. When the procession got to 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue, it turned left and proceeded past George Silundika Street and Robert Mugabe Way, the latter previously named after Lord Grey, one of the directors of the British South Africa Company. At the intersection of Samuel Parirenyatwa and 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue the procession turned right and went past Coghlan Primary School, named after Southern Rhodesia's first prime minister. The deafening fanfare continued until the parade reached the Trade Fair grounds. From humble beginnings in the colonial period, the Trade Fair had grown into a huge annual international market with several gigantic halls for exhibitors.

During the course of the year the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair Company allowed churches, in particular the Pentecostal churches that have large numbers of followers, to rent space for their services. The Assemblies of God had hired Hall Number 2 for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. The centre-piece of the celebrations, Reverend Mkwanazi, was chauffeur-driven into the hall. The entrance is big enough to accommodate a car. Though not formally accorded the title of Spiritual Leader, the Reverend Mkwanazi must have felt this was what he had always wanted. All the assemblies had been brought together – the fulfilment of the Reverend Bhengu's dream and, with his preferred successor physically occupying centre stage, the feeling must have been overwhelming and the fulfilment of prophetic desires.

The stage was well designed and bore the church's colour scheme. There was a powerful public address system. The sun had by then traversed the better part of the eastern sky, and the temperature and the humidity were high inside the hall. There is no uniform that is worn by worshippers, as is the case among the Salvationists, Methodists, Guta Ramwari and a host of other churches – both mainstream and apostolic. The ladies take advantage of the absence of such restrictions on fashion to showcase their good dress sense.

It was time for the inspiring praise and worship that the Reverend Mkwanzazi had so appreciated in America. It was led by assembly members from Harare, whose choir donned gold and black uniforms for the women and all black for the men, who also wore black shoes but with gold ties. It was indeed the golden jubilee for the Assemblies of God. Then it was time for the offerings. The Pentecostals always do this in grand style. The church band came into life and the atmosphere was more than electric. Men stood in front holding baskets that soon were bursting to the seams with American dollars. The sound of catcalls filled the massive hall. As the choir from Hwange danced, the congregation joined in and swayed to the captivating music. Their outstretched arms swayed like tree leaves to a more than gentle breeze. Some were clapping their hands in rhythm to the music. More, buoyed by the music, went to deposit the 'Obama' notes in the baskets. Singing and dancing do inspire and motivate. The previous year Zimbabwe's economy had to all intents and purposes ground to a miserable halt. A world record was broken in the currency denominations that the country had introduced. From millions, the country sank into trillions, zillions and beyond. At school many had not, in

terms of counting competency, gone beyond a million. This time everybody was a trillionaire – worth nothing in real terms.

### **Reverend Maswanganyi Speaks**

The Reverend Mkwanazi went up onto the stage to introduce Reverend Maswanganyi. “He is here for a few hours,” said Reverend Mkwanazi. He then invited the Reverend Dr Elijah Maswanganyi, a member of the South African National Executive of the Church, to address the gathering. “The march this morning was a great success,” declared the South African based clergyman. “The presence of the Assemblies of God in Zimbabwe is a reality. We acknowledge, appreciate, recognise and affirm the revolutionary and visionary leadership of Baba Mkwanazi. I walked with the people. I remembered my first arrival in 1967, when I was a tiny handsome Shangani boy before I was disfigured by marriage. Marriage can disfigure your figure.

“I want to give a message of encouragement. One of the greatest killers of leadership is discouragement, especially in Africa. We have graduated from slavery, apartheid, capitalism. What discourages us more in Africa, despite having African leaders who are supposed to know how fast to lead us to the land of promise, is that Africa is still not developing. These celebrations are a signal and the marriage of hope – let’s all say hope! Hope. Do not allow discouragement to kill you and burn you before you die.

“Discouragement is bewilderment. Discouragement is confusion. Discouragement is negativeness towards the future, Discouragement is our exhaustion. Discouragement is powerlessness. I go back with a message of hope, especially uBaba

Mkwanazi. You remind me of Martin Luther King during the struggle in the South, succeeding against all odds.”

Reverend Maswanganyi went on to tell the story of Rosa Parks whose determination led to the Montgomery bus boycott, which was supported by Martin Luther King. Sister Pollock, a 72 year old, walked during the boycott. She was offered a lift, which she declined, saying, “Yes my feet are tired, but my soul has rest.” Freedom without freedom is an antidote to discouragement.

“Each age has its own leaders. It was Reverend Bhengu, and it is our Father Mkwanazi today. When a new leader arises, you the elderly must learn to live to pass on the baton stick to the young ones.” Reverend Maswanganyi, a prolific writer, made mention of his 34<sup>th</sup> publication on coaching and mentoring. He then declared emphatically, “Let the church roll on. Let the Gospel be preached under the guidance of the Holy Ghost.” A well-travelled pastor, Reverend Doctor Maswanganyi has been involved in leadership research for twenty-five years. He then took leave of the celebrants and headed for the Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo International Airport, where he boarded the Airlink aircraft back to South Africa. Meanwhile, the commemorative activities continued for the rest of the day.

### **Pioneers’ Witnesses**

The day of joyous celebrations certainly belonged to people like Reverend Mkwanazi and Eleanor. They were among the few elderly people who had seen the church grow from the humble beginnings to what it was at the celebrations. One person in the congregation exclaimed, “This is an historic moment. It will not come again. To

Reverend G B and wife, you are heroes.” A commemorative calendar was on sale for USD3.00. There was time for a tribute to Pastor Mkolo for his sterling work towards church growth. He established more than 20 assemblies, a convention and a Bible School. His son Godfrey, now based in Australia, was back for the occasion. One of the pioneers of the establishment of the Assemblies of God in Bulawayo is Mrs Miya. She was given the platform to reflect back on the early days when the church started. She mentioned the names of Msiza and Khoza, and the Tshabalala township where the Reverend and Eleanor stayed at the time of their arrival back in Bulawayo. Another speaker, Mrs Mutuku from the Eastern Cape, was given the platform to give witness to the journey she had travelled in helping the church take root, She preached with gusto and used English to say the word of God. The preaching was so moving and touching that the congregation raised their hands and waved them in the air in absolute adulation. There was much translating into SiNdebele and into Shona.

The heat was becoming unbearable. Many in the hall were fanning themselves with papers and Bible jackets. Many who had their Bibles open were able to follow the scriptures to which Mrs Mutuku was referring. A resounding refrain of Hallelujah punctuated her preaching. Her eloquence was of a rare kind. “Jesus is the way, the truth and the resurrection,” said the powerful preacher as she resumed her seat. Another preacher went up onto the stage. The preacher called for deliverance and, stepping forward, made an appeal, “My brother, Jesus wants to save you.” The call was repeated several times for maximum effect. “The healing power of Jesus is here! Come for your healing. Come for your deliverance.” Many responded positively to the calls. There

was more and more music as preparations were made to feed the multitudes. The elders and their wives, together with the pastors and their wives, filed out of Hall 2. They were going to have lunch in Hall 3, a hall that is as massive as Hall 2. The rest were asked to remain behind in Hall 2 where they were going to have their meal.

After lunch the celebrations continued. Pentecostal churches are at ease with advanced technology. This is part of their appeal to the youth. The musical instruments were all high tech. There were laptops and projectors that beamed images. This is one area where the generation gap is apparent. The elderly pastors were not familiar with information and communications technology, although attempts were made to introduce them to it. A second session of praise and worship came. The men in dark suits and ties danced alongside the women who were clad in tight fitting dresses. The younger members of the congregations swayed in response to the blaring music. The Harare choir was on the floor again. This time they were dressed in white, including their shoes. Music plays an important part in the Assemblies of God, as it does in other Pentecostal churches as well as in Apostolic or African Initiated/Independent Churches (AICs). This is apparently in line with African Traditional Religion, where ecstatic dancing is part and parcel of the spiritual experience.

While the Apostolic churches and the Zion Christian Churches (ZCC) often sing acappella, the Assemblies of God and other Pentecostals have introduced western musical instruments with powerful speakers. The church members participate in the dances. This is unlike the practice in some churches where the organ or piano is played while the congregants are glued to their seats. Body



movement is seen as taboo in that it is associated with African Traditional Religion, which is perceived as pagan and against Christianity. This is the view of the Christian denominations that have not succeeded in distinguishing between the essence of Christianity and the western culture in which Christianity was expressed. In the Assemblies of God the congregation comes to life; it sings, dances, ululates and makes catcalls. It is all engrossing and it appeals to the younger generation, who are not hoodwinked by western culture masquerading as part and parcel of Christianity. Music is spiritual and assists the inner struggle. It is no wonder the Afro-Americans resorted to emotional singing to express their feelings. Closer to home, the South Africans who toiled under the repressive yoke of apartheid resorted to song as an integral part of the struggle to free themselves from racial domination. Music is emancipating. To some people it provides some escape from the objective realities of the world. It was clear that the majority of the celebrants were young people who have been attracted to the Assemblies of God. The church's future is a function of the proportion of the youth within its ranks.

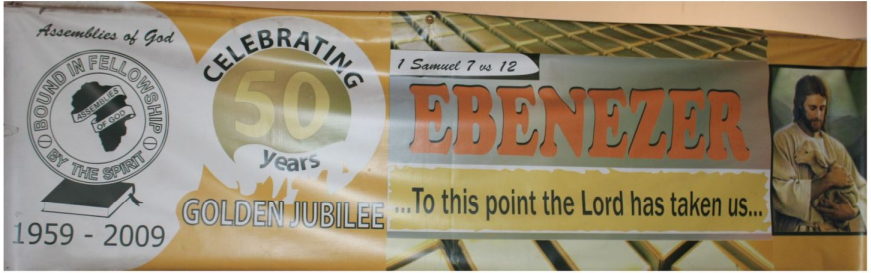
There was more time for witnessing. Mavesere was next to do so. He referred to the "chariot of fire crossing the Limpopo River into Southern Rhodesia." He ended by shouting "Back To God! We have a vision to carry from Cape to Cairo." He was now following the expansionist rhetoric of Cecil John Rhodes, whose grand dream was to establish a British sphere of influence stretching from the Cape (in South Africa) to Cairo (in Egypt). Mrs Ndlovu was in charge of the cutting of the cake. The Harare choir rose to give a song. "*Siyakubonga* – 50 years of praising God." The men

responded, “*Ngatifare, Siyajabula*. Fifty years of peace and growth.” The dancing got wilder, *kutambira*, church-dancing for the church.

Several guests from other churches and from political parties attended the function. Mr Esaph Mdlongwa came from the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-M). ZANU-PF was represented by Mr Martha Khumalo and Chitsa. Churches represented were Jesus International, Great Tidings (D Masuku), ZAOGA (Mr Tembo, the Bulawayo overseer), the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) and the World Pentecostal.

### **Fire Fire – Greater Things Lie Ahead**

When Chimusoro acknowledged that Reverend Bhengu’s Cape to Cairo had only reached as far as Zimbabwe, he made mention of Reverend Mkwanazi being the Spiritual Leader in Zimbabwe. What a great acknowledgement, something that Reverend Mkwanazi wanted formalized. As the day wore on, the leading gospel singer Fungisayi Zvakavapano-Mashavave belted out hot gospel music, which she blended with toyi-toyi beat – *Jesu Wakandifira Pamuchinjikwa* (Jesus died for me on the cross). She literally ignited a spiritual fire and the whole place was ablaze with spirited dancing. She switched to the more familiar *Anouya Makomborero* and the whole atmosphere was steamy and hot, literally and spiritually. Her scintillating gospel music marked the end of the golden jubilee celebrations for the over 700 guests.









## **Sermons by Rev Mkwanazi**

### **THE LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN LEADER**

#### **1 Timothy 4:16**

Spiritual leadership is not an occupation: **it is a calling!**

Only when we understand leadership in light of GOD'S calling on our lives will be equipped to lead effectively.

#### **1. HIS CALL**

- a. Not earned by merit – 1Tim. 1:14; Deut.18:5
- b. By divine appointment - 1Tim. 1:12,Gal.1:15
- c. Sealed at ordination -1Tim. 4:14,2Tim.1:6
- d. Primarily to teaching and preaching- 1Tim. 4:13
- e. To be jealously guarded -1Tim. 6:20-21

#### **2. HIS AIM**

- a. To have a loving and pure heart, good conscience, sincere faith -1Tim. 1:5,Acts 24:16,John.3:3
- b. To shun the bad, and “aim...at the righteousness.-1Tim. 6:11-13
- c. To shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness.-1Tim. 2:22
- d. To be kind, a good teacher, patient and gentle.-2Tim. 2:24-25
- e. To be tough and courageous soldier. -2Tim. 2:3-7

#### **3. HIS LIFE**

- a. To be above reproach – in his home – 1Tim.3:12  
-in his attitude 1Tim.3:2-7  
-in his relationships to outsiders-1Tim.3:7
- b. To be an example to all-1Tim.4:12 in speech  
Titus 3:2, Love,conduct,faith,purity1Tim.5:2,22
- c. To demonstrate contentment with necessities – 1Tim.6:7-8
- d. To be characterized by a clear conscience -2Tim.1:3, Acts 24:16
- e. To manifest power, love and self-control- 2Tim.1:7
- f. Not to be entangled in civilian pursuits- 2Tim.2:4
- g. To be given hospitality – Titus.1:8
- h. To be one of integrity – Titus 2:7 –Honest in details

#### **4. HIS LIFE**

- a. Concern must be for all- 1Tim.5:1-16
- b. No partiality, favoritism - 1Tim.5:21 from pastor to parishioners
- c. Laymen must share in teaching - 2Tim.2:22
- d. Laymen **HIS SOURCE AND AUTHORITY**
- e. must help in case of special need –Titus 3:14

**5. HIS SOURCE AND AUTHORITY**

- a. The Lord Jesus Christ -1Tim.6;3
- b. The Holy Spirit -2Tim.1:14
- c. The Scriptures -2Tim.3:16-Old and New Testaments 1Tim.5:18
- d. Know your Bible

Godly leader's character and conduct should be models for members to imitate in what they are and do.

Paul told the believers at Corinth they should follow his example- as he followed Christ- 1Corinth.11:1

The same truth was given to young Timothy in one of Paul's letters:

"Don't let anyone look down on you because of your youth. Instead set an example for the believers by your speech, life, love, faith and purity -1Tim.4:12". In other words Timothy's character was to be a model for the believers to imitate.

Peter also writes these important words in Leadership: "I have something to say to the leaders and elders in your group. I too am an elder...I beg you to take care of God's people as a shepherd would watch over his sheep. Serve them with a willing heart ....Do not lead them with a heavy hand. But be a good example which can they follow". 1Pet 5:1-3

**SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP : JESUS AS THE MODEL**

Jesus' life is so profound and so beyond our common experience that we must continually re-examine it, lest we assume Jesus operated merely by leadership theory that we value today.

- Jesus sought His Father's will above else. He had a vision for Himself and for his disciples, but the vision came
- From His Father. Rom 12:2
- The key to Jesus' leadership was the intimate relationship He had with His Father. John 10:30
- Jesus realised that, "by myself I can do nothing John 5:19-20,30"
- Often when religious leaders challenged Jesus' actions, he explained that he was doing exactly what the Father showed Him to do. John 20:21
- Jesus only chose the twelve disciples after He spent the entire night in the presence of the Father. Luke 6:12-13
- According to Jesus, even the teaching he gave his disciples came from the Father. John 6:49, 4:10, 15:15, 17:8
- Jesus equaled greatness with being a servant: "...Whoever wants to become good among you must be your servant" Mark 10:43



## **CONCLUSION**

If Jesus provides the models for spiritual leadership the key is to obey and to preserve everything the Father reveals to us of his will.

- Our prayer should be that which Jesus instructed his disciples to pray: "Your Kingdom come your will be done as it is on earth as it is done in heaven. Matt.6:10
- If Christians around the world were to suddenly renounce their personal agendas, their life goals and their aspirations, and begin responding in radical obedience to everything God tells them, the world would be turned upside down.
- That's what first Christians did, and the world is still talking about it.

## **WHERE IS THY GOD**

Psalms 42:1-3,10

### **Introduction:**

The devil is an accuser of brethren He is the father of lies an opposition leader

**God is above us** Psalms 91 v1,4,5

- a. He that he dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty
- b. Thou shall not be afraid of the terror by night or day (verse 5) Exod. 15:27 John 4:13-14; 7:37

### **He is below us**

Psalms 91 v10-14

- a. He shall give his angels charge - they shall bear you up lest thou dash thy foot against a stone (v12)

### **He is in front of us**

- a. He guides us (Exod. 14:19-20)
- b. They that are led by the spirit are children of God (Rom 8:14;Heb13:8;Acts 16:6-10)
- c. My sheep (John 10:3-4) They know His Voice

**He is behind us** Genesis 17v1

- a. Walk before thee and be thou perfect
- b. God watches our step
- c. Inspects our moves

**He is around us** Psalms 125:1-2

- a. Surrounded by God (verse 2)
- b. Job was surrounded (Job 1v9-10)
- c. Elisha prayed –open the eyes of Gehazi (2Kings 6:14-17)
- d. Pray for thee to be blind (verse18)

**He is in us** Exodus 25v8

- a. I may dwell among them (verse 8)
- b. And He shall be in you (John 14:17)
- c. I will dwell in them (2 Cor. 6:16)

### **Conclusion**

As many as received Him (John 1:11-12)

Behold I stand at the door and knock (Rev.3:20)

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